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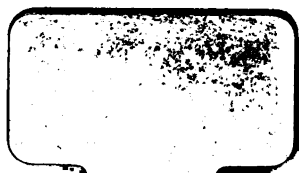
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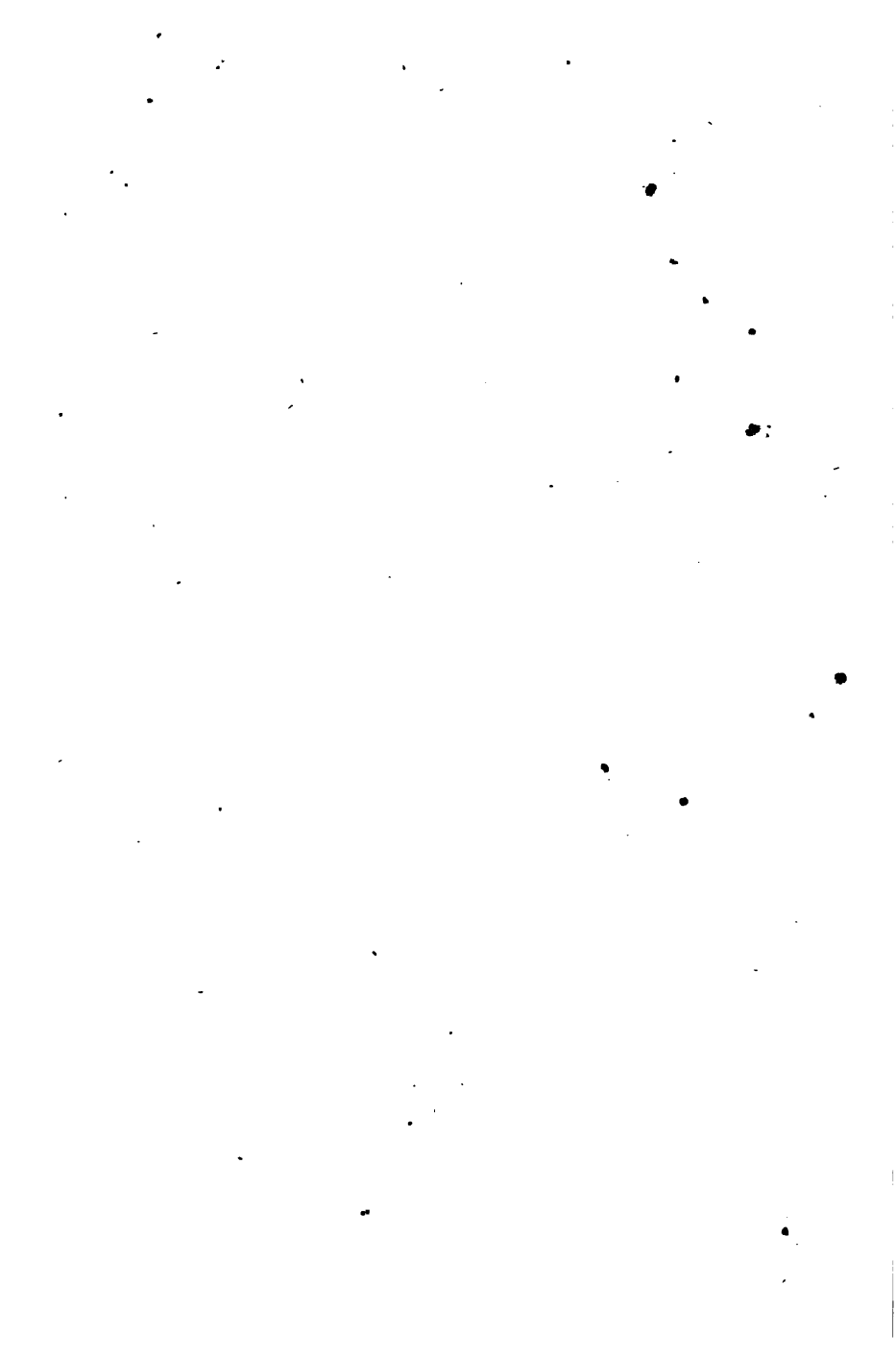
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POPPIES IN THE CORN.

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POPPIES IN THE CORN;

OR,

GLAD HOURS IN THE GRAVE YEARS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF .

"THE HARVEST OF A QUIET EYE,"

ETC.

i.e. Vernon. (J. R.)



"Oh, to what uses shall we put
The wild-weed flower that simply blows?
And is there any moral shut
Within the bosom of the rose?"

"But any man that walks the mead,
In bud, or blade, or bloom, may find,
According as his humours lead,
A meaning suited to his mind."

TENNYSON.

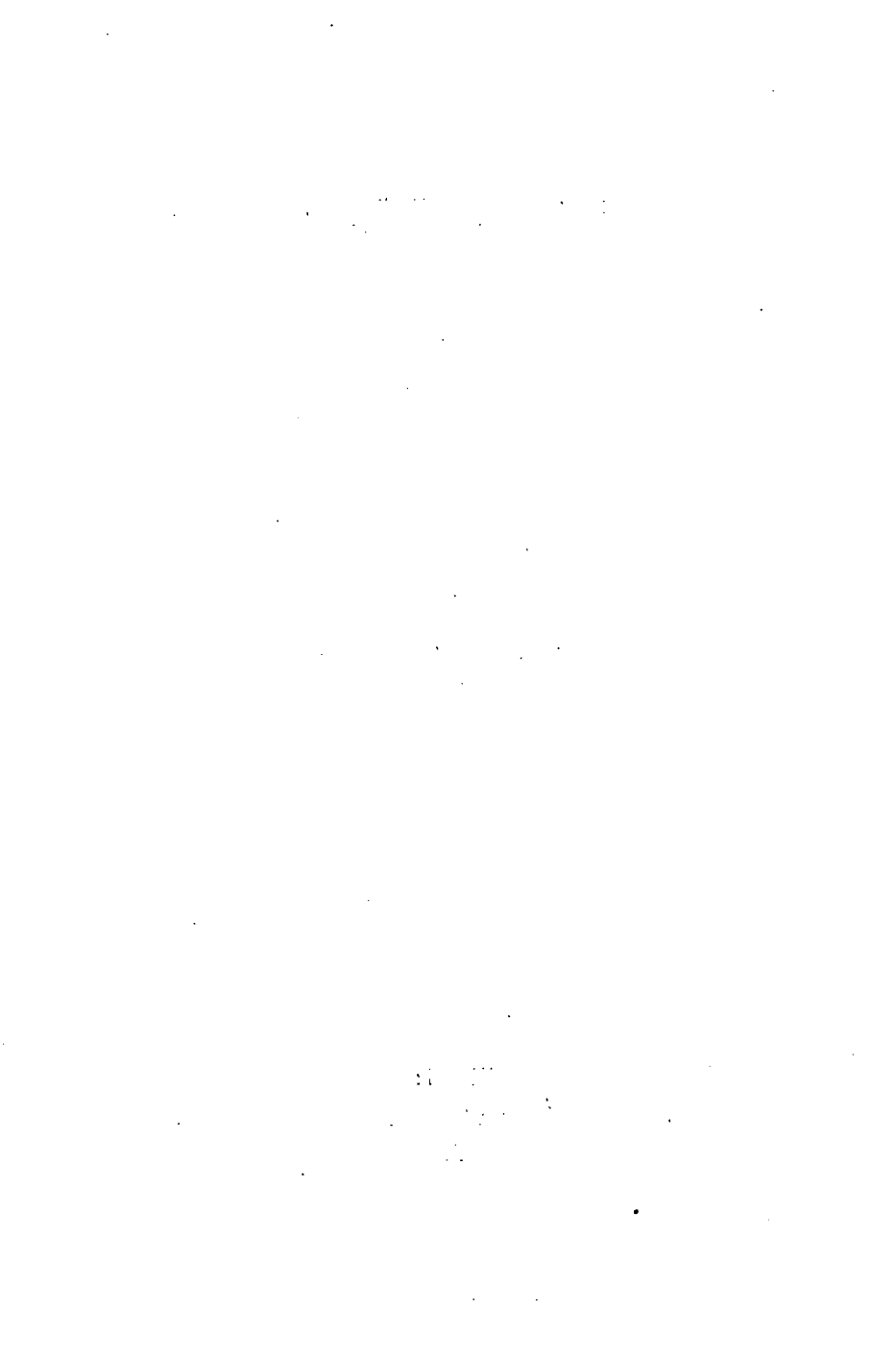
LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1872.

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270. f. 290.



Dedicated,

WITH DEAR LOVE, TO

MY WIFE.

MONKS.

*"When from home they stirred
Sweet their voices?"*

—Still a blessing
Closed their merriest word ;
And their gayest smile
Told of musings
Solitary,
And the hallowed aisle.

J. H. NEWMAN.

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POPPIES IN THE CORN.

INTRODUCTION.

I WANTED a string with which to tie this handful of essays together, and, having hit upon the above general title, I was, as I passed through the corn-fields, confirmed and established in my choice of it. For there they were, the vivid glad flowers in the sober and grave corn-ranks ; laughing up here and there with, seemingly, no further end than mere enjoyment, amid the steady utilitarian life of the tall dull-green wheat-lines. Here and there that scarlet flash, heightened by the satin black centre, caught the eye ; and (unless it had been the eye out of which looked a soured heart) certainly brought a softening of pleased consciousness into its dullest and hardest abstraction. Here and there the idle poppies, but everywhere the useful corn.

And so, I thought, it is in life, especially (to be egotistic for a moment) in a life, like mine, made of sweet grave days,—of, as it were, myriads of swaying, solemn ears, hushed and quiet in colour, never speaking above a whisper ; tall and straight, affording no room for exuberances and superfluities of growth ; turning blue air, and broad sun, and cool rain, each alike into useful corn : orderly, monotonous, ear like to ear all down

the long ruled rows. Some ears, it is true, blighted and black ; some poorer than they might and should be ; still, to a casual glance, even row matched with even row, in what seems, perhaps, in morbid hours, a wearisome uniformity. But, see how pleasant an analogy I find when I look at the cornfields, and lo ! to break the routine and sameness, the surprise of that glad scarlet flower among the long interminable lines of grave ears, its growth not straight and formal, but spreading and exuberant : one close at hand, another flash a little way beyond ; a select cluster here ; a galaxy there. And the eye rejoiced to see them : it did not grudge the space they took—these holidays of the wheatfield—from the patient, humdrum, sober, useful corn-stalks. A field all poppies would have been sad to see, and tiring to the eye ; a field all poppies, with the strangled corn sending up only few spindled spikes in tufts here and there. But, the field being chiefly corn, the innocent gladness and glee of the flowers pleased the eye and refreshed the heart.

And now I scarcely need interpret my parable. Most lives that have a serious useful purpose are made up of days and years that upon the whole are uneventful, monotonous, grave in colour, and subdued in tone. Day after day, long ranks of them, each much like its fellow : almost a weariness to the heart, at times, to look backwards and forwards, and trace the perspective of those long ranks composed of the corn-bearing hours and days. I might say more than here I shall say, of the sad patches of smut, and blight, and barren land in those lives which have the highest work to do. But the tradesman's, the schoolmaster's, the clerk's, the doctor's, the lawyer's, the mechanic's, the statesman's, the clergyman's life—each has this in common, that it is made up of days bearing fruit more or less valuable, but days, upon the whole, as like to

each other as two ears of corn, and wearying at last by their unvaried sameness. Again, each life has this in common, that it has Poppies in the Corn—glad hours in the grave years.

And I, who have before this, in another volume, tried to gather in a little Harvest of useful corn, am now minded to go out into the fields, and pluck a handful of these same poppy hours. Here an hour, and there a day, and further on a three weeks' cluster—times or scenes merely of recreation, pleasant to remember, to imagine, and to write about—poppy papers, of not much use ;—and yet I bethink me that poppies and recreations are not without an office ; they rest and soothe the overworn body, mind, and brain, and gather up its energies for new corn-growing. And see, what long lines of wheat (more or less full in ear) I can contemplate in all the sermons written by this pen ! Let, then, these light essaylings have the room of the poppies along those sober series.





No. I.

THREE WEEKS AT THE SEASIDE.

MEN are in some respects, much alike. As with a pack of transformation cards, certain phases of mind, certain moods, certain conditions of thought and feeling, may be shifted backwards and forwards, and will fit very sufficiently well under almost any costume. On this theme I might moralize, but that would be to depart from my present purpose. So I will only remark that it little matters under which dress I slip the experiences, feelings, enjoyments which are to be the subject of this brief paper. Any character would suit them almost equally well. All men like, all men are sure at times to want, imperatively to require, a holiday—change of scene, thought, occupation. And it is but shifting the costume, and most that I say will suit as well the lawyer, the merchant, the doctor, the tradesman, the mechanic, as it does the country parson, in whose clothes it is my pleasure to dress my present every-day thoughts and experiences.

Three weeks—a clergyman's three weeks—at the seaside; consider the delight of it! Cottage services, night schools, Confirmation classes, Lent work, being over now, and the summer days drawing near. All men must have a change, or pine for want of one; and when the time at which it is due comes round, lo! the uneasiness begins to steal over them,

the desire to spread their wings. Just now, the warm nest and the circumscribed hedge contented them; but they have become unsettled, a restless fidgety feeling has taken the place of their content; the period for migration has come, and they are, for the time, weary of the locality in which the nest is built—to which they will yet, be sure, after but a few weeks of absence, be longing to wing their way home.

But my country parson is a Curate, with much to spend and little to get. He, like to others, is liable, (for he is human), to grow tired, not *of* his work, but *with* his work—at least, with the sameness of his work. He wants change of scene and occupation for a time; his brain wants airing—it has got close and stuffy: removal for a while from small worries, which have to his mind become big ones, would do him and his parish much good. But he has no intention of indulging in such a change. Oh no! His income does not justify (he sternly remarks) any such non-necessary expenditure. Two years ago they all went to the sea for six weeks, and forty pounds did not cover the extra outlay. They have only just recovered that drain. No! All the year through he has steadily and gravely declared that the exchequer won't stand it; that all thoughts and dreams of an outing for the young people this year must be laid aside. "For the young people," so he puts it; and, in truth, that which makes him feel such a Spartan in the declaration is chiefly the downcast look that comes over their bright eager features.

But the prudent wife was silent. *She* knew, none better, the necessity of close economy. Still she well knows that as a chief part of such economy, it is necessary that the bread-winner be kept going. And *she* had a shrewd fancy how it would be, knowing

the temperament of the man. He enjoyed and loved his work : still—

“ Poor Peggy hawks roses from street to street,
Till—think of that, ye who find life so sweet !—
She hates the smell of roses !”

She knew that, however well the mind's cleaned wheels ran, in time they were apt to get clogged and sluggish, and to show piteous signs of wanting to be taken to pieces and oiled afresh. The pretty familiar roads and meadow-paths and copses would in time be fraught with depression to the man, who—a little over-sensitive and over-anxious in tone of mind, and withal a little too much imbedded in the country—is apt to be hipped by twenty-four months' close and unbroken intentness of spirit upon the miniature government of his small community.

And now the Spring is past, the Summer is passing ; the pupils are gone, or going ; spite of his efforts against it, the poor parson begins to flag. Not that he gives up his work, but that it is always by an effort that he enters upon it ; protracting the time and rising languidly at last, for that six miles' walk of visit-making ; putting off the sermon-writing till late on Saturday ; writing it without enjoyment, and damped in the preaching it by the conviction that it must necessarily be poor stuff. All this is neither good for himself nor for his parish, and the prudent wife takes the side of the children now. They have had an extra pupil this year ; there was that 10*l.* note at Lady Kilmansegg's wedding the other day ; besides, they can save here and retrench there ; the children seem to want a change. Beatrice and Eva both look a little droopy ; Harold certainly deserves a treat for that scholarship he has just won at school ; besides, you, yourself, my dear, must positively have

a change and a rest before the winter-work comes on again. To all this he is obdurate for some time, but she gives him line. The struggles become fainter and weaker; at last, in an unguarded hour, the eldest daughter brings the landing-net, as it were, and the fish is laid gasping on the grass.

Once having decided on the seaside holiday, the enjoyment of it begins forthwith. Anticipation: ay, the appetite beforehand is often the best part of the meal; and there is anticipation enough, I promise you, in this case. There is the important question of where, and the scarce less momentous decision of when, to go. These settled, there are (for the young people, at any rate) the days to count, and a heap of important preparations to make. The father already begins to perk up under this watering-pot of anticipation. The children—that last seaside stay, a whole two years ago, has become a sort of fairy vision to them. Emma, the maid, is among the most elated and eager. Harold and Ambrose have long had their lines ready, and their dream is of grey mullet, sizeable dabs, and large eels. Beatrice has her sketching-block, and renews the gaps in her moist colour box. Eva has a delicious anticipation of rare seaweeds, superb shells, bright sea-anemones. Gerald remembers the shrimps for tea, and the hot rolls for breakfast. The mother is busy with all sorts of dress and supervision of many matters. The father, sooth to say, is looking forward (although he hardly knows this) more to the pause from endless little calls and small frets, and from work which never seems done. From all this he is looking forward to the sense of freedom, of absence of need to do anything except rest or amuse himself. He will read lighter books, perhaps a novel or two—pastry after his more solid fare. He will swim boats with the boys; will watch

their fishing with much of their excitement ; will vie with them in shots with round sea-stones at their erections of pebbles upon the breakwater posts. With the girls he will paddle about the low rocks fringed with brown seaweed ; he will be the referee in the question of the newness or value of pebbles, of shells, of all sea-growth ; he will lay the clear tints on the rough-papered block, to the despairing admiration of Beatrice. He will lie on the beach at his wife's feet, and read to her Tennyson, as in old courting days :—

“ Many an evening by the waters did we watch the stately ships,
And our spirits rushed together at the touching of the lips.”

And tender sweet remembrances will return upon their hearts from the old days, at the words full fraught with old associations.

And so all are big with schemes ; the young ones full of active, the elders full of passive plans for enjoyment. The day approaches. It is “ next week.” It is “ this week.” It is here. Oh, morning of excitement ! and last twitches at corded boxes, and last bringing of just-thought-of articles to cram into already over-crammed bags. At last, the train, eagerly watched for, grows from a speck to a leviathan : the luggage is all safely in, and the journey, like no other journey, full of all delight, especially for the young, to whom journeys are of rare occurrence, begins. Who shall have the seats by the window ? But they remember, they will all have to change again, so it doesn't matter much now. The great excitement will be for that long four or five hours' stretch, which ends in—

“ The width of the waters, the rush
Of the grey expanse.”

O joy, if (as in my own young days) the change were

to the Steamboat ! For *we* used to make our excursions even to dear old cockney Margate ! Do I not remember it all ? Fear lest it should be the *Royal Adelaide*, glee that it was the *Isle of Thanet*, or the *Prince of Wales*. Blackwall, Sheerness, the Nore ; the father in his element (he ever loved the sea, and loved Margate—the scene of his old courting days ; and concerning which, has he not written in the venerable “Mirror?”) we anxious (call us not greedy ; but oh, the appetite that sea approaching voyage in that ever-tremulous bark awoke !), anxious until the point was settled, that we were to dine on board. Then the cold chicken (poultry is ever the ambrosia of the young), the lobster salad, the Edinburgh ale ! Then up on deck again, from the trembling cabin, having for an hour seen only the grey sea through those port-hole windows ; and the excitement of noting where we were ; what progress we had made : whether we had passed the Nore ; whether the Essex coast had departed from our horizon, leaving us indeed able to realize that we were in the open sea. Then, until the Captain detected us, or refused to wink longer at our growing audacity, the for-some-time-successful attempt to mount higher and yet higher on the paddle-boxes : the taking in of every individuality of our fellow-passengers (in whom we ever after, upon Pier or Jetty, felt a sort of proprietorship), the advance to the very prow of the vessel, and the strong pushing forward, with that unstaying persistency, upon the waters that parted hither and thither in a green glass curve. At last, Herne Bay, and when the churned foam had eddied away, the eager watching for the pellucid jelly-fish in the semi-transparent water. The long black pier left behind, soon the windmills and the new church cresting the cliffs, the Jetty cleared of its ant-

swarms. Margate! Then aggravating us, who have but just arrived here, the busmen, with their "Now for Rimsgit! now for Rimsgit!" the boys, with their plaintive cadence,



Who'll chuck a - 'ya-penny into the wa - ee - tar?

the trucks of vast Whitstables (I remember in the days of extreme youth, going halves in a halfpenny one with my younger brother; I say, I *do* remember it), the familiar bathing-houses, Beales, and Philpots, and Foats.

But I must go back to my party. It may be Margate, or it may be Scarborough, or it may be any other watering-place; wheresoever it be, you arrive at it at last. Then comes the hunt for lodgings. Here we have just the thing! The landlady—her stays creaking loudly as she went—has ascended the stairs and marshalled the way. Yes, this drawing-room is just what is wanted. Already that bundle of spades is laid upon the sofa, and the parental eye begins to plan the arrangements of the room. Well, that bedroom will do; yes, and this; and that double-bedded room; and this attic, with the best view of all, is just the thing for the servant. And you are down again in the parlour, trying, with already half ownership, the armchair. How much?—100*l.* a week, and 5*l.* for the kitchen fire; or something about as impossible and ridiculous. *That* won't do, it is quite certain. Partly indignant, and partly abashed, you seize the bundle of wrappers, &c.; the parcel of spades is also resumed, and you sally forth homeless into the wide wide watering-place again.

If you are unprosperous, your experience may be more extensive than you wish. *This* place smacks of fleas; *that* has just one bedroom short; this, again, is too dear. At last, "Eureka!" is the cry; and the bundles are deposited with weary satisfaction, and the luggage is soon wheeled up. Your temporary ownership is established. You can afford to pity those jaded travellers who (having come by a later boat) knock at your door—the bill having not been yet taken down. Aha! they shall not have this snug sitting-room, those bedrooms with the sea-views: not for the whole duration of a clergyman's three weeks (nearer four) will you relinquish possession! Is not tea being even now got ready, with that seductive cottage bread on which you batten by the seaside? Have you not collared a fellow with "Sherimps are prawns," and do not the large brown barley-awned—fish? must I call them? head and tail together in a delicious bend, loaded with black or yellow spawn (which can't be got at, because of the legs), do they not pile the dish, fresh and crisp, and as though longing to be helped out of their husks by a peel and a pinch? Have you not further taken black mail of that man with the truck, and the melodious refrain—



And had *you* not your meed of toil and anxiety before these advantages were gained? Away, then, with weak and foolish compassion ; look with Stoic indifference at that hot, and weary, and over-burdened group, that have already tried so many doors in vain. See ! the children are in the balcony, gloating on the view of the sea, frantic with anticipated delights, with

visions of donkeys, velocipedes, bathing-machines, sand-castles, seaweeds, skates'-eggs, shells. But (you assure the protesting wife that there is just time) Harold, Ambrose, and you *must* have a minute's run down to the sands, and up to the plunging retreating sea. You watch how it perpetually lays a white tablecloth at your feet, and departing to fetch the viands, ever finds its preparation sucked up by the brown sand; and ever re-lays it; retreats; returns; still laying it again and again. This is rather an epicurean simile; still, the state of your appetite (which has loathed everything for months) provokes it. And you go back to do ample justice to the tea, which has brewed now, and to its concomitants, and afterwards you go with the Wife (the children being in bed after their journey), for a turn in the cool evening upon the Parade, or along the wet shining Jetty: and you see the "gleaming crest" lit up of the evening star; and you watch the long broken lane of moonlight tremble upon the quivering water. Against the black, mussel-clad posts the brimming sea slaps, and splashes, and rattles. The tide is rising now: it flops and beats under the planks on which you are walking. It is time to return. You both are pleasantly tired, and pleased with the *newness* of everything—meals, and walk, and bed, and all. And you sleep without rocking; only with a sense of always rising and falling, and with a plash and beating of water making a "song without words" in your sleep.

Then, next morning, there is the awaking to the consciousness of the removal from your mind of what had grown to be a load. You dress, enjoying the sea-view as you do so; you saunter out (the boys have been on the sands an hour), for a little sea-air before breakfast; also to do a little marketing. Some slices of ham and some snowy eggs, perhaps a dried

haddock; some appetizing French bread. There is no doubt that eating (I blush to write it, but no one who knows the writer would call him a gourmand)—there is no doubt, I say, that eating and drinking make one of the most grave and weighty employments at the seaside. We are so hungry; and all is new and different. All sorts of enticing little eatables may be had. The breads are different; the dinner hour is different: there is a breaking through of all the routine of home. Three-cornered puffs, or pastrycooks' tarts; all sorts of fish (but this should have come first); much fruit; cunning dinners, seductive little suppers. Then the marketing; what an enjoyment is this! Even the entry into the butcher's (you would rather be excused from such duties at home); the early visit to the fish-stall; the select plums, or late raspberries, or blunt pears. That lobster would have lost half his zest had you not yourself picked him out, and brought him home in your own hand. Indeed all this change of life, and breaking through the every-day rules and customs of the rest of the year, form one great delight and refreshment of the stay at the seaside. For this reason, no doubt, some people—some Clerics even—love to depart from their sober home costumes into strange vagaries of dress. You may see them in every (remarkable) style of hat; even with the white tie laid aside for check; with cutaway coats; possibly in light slippers. For my part I, ordained later in life, love my uniform too well to endure to part with it anywhere—except for my couch, at night.

But oh, how much I had to say; and the stern Editor bids me stop even here!*

* These papers appeared originally in *London Society*.

lingered near my parson during his three weeks ; to have wandered with his boys ; to have sought specimens with his girls ; to have marvelled at the youth, and health, and strength of stomach which could make a donkey-ride a delight for his youngest ones ; to have sauntered on the Parade, and listened to the band, and criticized the company ; to have avoided those people that we know, but don't want to be bothered with down here ; to have tried two or three churches on the different Sundays ; to have indulged in divers explorations, and rocked in boats within the white chalk caves, peering down into the deep clear grass-green water ; to have watched Punch and Judy on the sands. And then to have dwelt upon the pleasure of return home ; to have run into the garden to see how the things had got on ; into the courtyard to see how the young rabbits had grown ; to have greeted this and that familiar face, all aglow with pleasure to see them all back again "amongst us ; and sure, you be all looking so brown and well !"

All this must remain unwritten, at least at present ; and I must leave our parson and his family to relish the sea-breeze alone.





No. II.

THREE WEEKS AT THE SEASIDE.—PART II.

IT was granted me to resume the subject which I grumblingly laid down at the end of my last essay. Let me pick up its thread again.

I left my Parson with Wife and children just at the end of his journey, and comfortably housed in a lodging, with a checrful balcony and a good sea-view. I gave him leave to indulge in a little half-malicious gratification, at seeing the arrivals by the second boat still tramping the streets, and toiling after lodgings—a toil made the more severe by the many small parcels, bags, and bundles which were distributed among the members of the hunt. And, watching him lightly running up the steps and up the stairs, after that first visit to the edge of the hoary sea, you saw how already the holiday had begun its work with our friend. That sprightly man, as young and eager as his two boys, you would hardly recognise in him the bent back, and seamed brow, and dragging walk, into which he had gradually drooped at his curacy of Multum-in-Parvo.

For the first day or two the life is very indefinite ; unsettled, perhaps. But the parson does not particularly want to be settled : he has for a long while now gone along in one even groove ; it is pleasure enough for him to be able to saunter about and reconnoitre, and stare into the shops (a great enjoyment, I can

assure you, if his home be in the country, with no more interesting emporiums than that of Jones the saddler's, and Ray's the general shop for tea and corduroys, flour and boots, pickles and gingham umbrellas). He loves to stare at the shop windows, only to this enjoyment there is one drawback—viz., that a horrible thirst for buying all sorts of natty little matters comes over him, making this class of recreation dangerous. He had better, in such saunters, have his Wife at his elbow. Nervously after such an hour of wandering does he extract that silver-paper parcel for the Wife, and, hoping for impunity on the ground of this proved first thought for her, proceed apologetically to land from his pocket this little fardel containing just what Beatrice has wanted so long: —and then of course it would not have been right to have left Eva out. The boys he need not mention now: they indeed have secured their prizes, and are long ago off and away with them. These escapades are mildly borne, even graciously received, at first; but repeated too often, the wretched already self-convicted man quails under his wife's reproof; and sneaks away again with Beatrice and Eva, like liver and gizzard, one under each wing, for a walk on the Parade.

Indeed there is, especially, as I say, if you are generally out of the way of shops, an exquisite delight in the mere act of spending money. An overmastering pleasure, a keen relish, in the simple process of buying: and this without any regard to the need or value of the thing bought. To stroll down the Bazaar, stopping at this stall and that, until some foolishly over-eager stall-keeper bears down upon the victim with "Can I show you anything, sir?"—driving him away disgusted and sulky: much as though an unskilful birdcatcher were to pull up the nets just ere

the bird had hopped in. At last to pick out an object, having been for once allowed a good previous penn'orth of examining the articles; and to have to look up and even summon the vendor: for it is quite pleasant to have the nets brought together when you are ready to be caught. Or (having first secured the free-gratis exhibition which is to be had outside the window of the bookseller and dealer in nicknacks) to remember or discover that you want some small matter (even a penny paper may sometimes serve the turn), and to gain rightful admission to the well-spread banquet within; and so to secure a leisurely and full survey of this counter and that, and the glass bookcase with the clean new books of the season. Furtively, perhaps, and a little guiltily to glance at *Punch*, to peep into the *Times*, to take up *Blackwood*, or the *Cornhill* (your own copies await you, you know, at home). All this, I say, you do a little ashamedly, if you have but come in for a *Standard*,—but bold and unabashed are your movements if a shilling has been laid out now, or if you have from time to time been a dealer here to such a large amount.

Merely to look is delicious; to buy is almost an excess of enjoyment. Especially, I think, to buy for others. Who knows not the zest of the return, after a week's run to London, with pockets and bag full of all sorts of articles, little and big? these for the wife; this for the son; that for the daughter; nor have the pleased bustling servants been forgotten. How anxiously you (the most eager and pleased of all;—we have the best authority for allotting to the giver himself the palm of enjoyment; and this is true, I think, even in minor instances;)—how impatiently, I say, you chafe at the delay of that loitering boy, to whom you entrusted the carpet-bag; how importantly

you unstrap and unlock it, surrounded by a pleased circle ; with what relish you extract the neat parcels, and watch with a grave but deep interest while they are undone. Oh misery, if the gown of brown, and the petticoat, so to speak, of silver paper, having been removed, the choice article is found to be in several fragments ! But let us hope that this never happens.

I have, however, sauntered away from my subject. Still, I do not pretend to aim at rigid and extreme method in these slight papers. Poppies, you know, must needs spread unrestrained, for all that tall corn which keeps so straight and in such regular rows. Sermons must keep to the point ;—holiday thoughts are free to roam where they will.

But the girls have been for a bath ; and they run up to you rosy, and sparkling-eyed, and dank-haired (one black and one golden, of course), and with cheeks cool and already hard and firm as the white of a salad-egg. They positively *can't* wait till dinner-time : they *must* have a bun now. Exactly (to tell the truth) your own feeling : still you give expression to a grave murmur as to spoiling their dinner ;—and then enter the pastrycook's. Delicious sight ! a large tin of new-laid buns, just served up and hot. With sternness worthy of Lycurgus, or Brutus even, you limit the repast to one bun apiece ; for what can be more disappointing than to have carefully thought out and provided a peculiarly appetizing dinner, and then not to have it enjoyed ? No fear of that now, however. You are all really like wolves long before dinner-time ; several furtive glances at your watch have been indulged in since one o'clock, and two seemed as though it would never come. Why do we choose such queer times for dinner when by the sea ?

There are who fix it even at three or four. At home such hours would be highly uncomfortable. But I suppose it is partly to get the long morning and evening, and partly to get the upsetting of ordinary everyday habits.

After dinner (again I blush to write it) you do feel slightly torpid; and then the thing is to draw the arm-chair to the window, to unfold the *Times* or the *Standard*, or to cut the leaves of the periodical, and leisurely and dreamily to enjoy the unwonted placidity and contentment of body and mind. Probably you doze: anyhow you are as good as asleep, lulled by that far monotony (the sea is at low tide), of the dull plunge and raking withdrawal of the never-ceasing shallow waves. The eyes dwell every now and then, with tranquil and restful enjoyment, upon the hushed-toned, twinkling space of water, the colour, under this cloudless sky, like that of a turquoise under tissue paper. The dear comfortable wife is seated on a hassock by your chair; her head rests against your leg; she is pretending to tat, or perhaps has secured Anthony Trollope's or Mrs. Oliphant's last effort—if effort be a fitting name for writing so easy and so pleasant.

There *are* yet *some* wholesome novels, some names which, you may feel secure, will at least protect you from the danger of a mental draught of neat brandy heightened with cayenne. The parson and the parson's wife rarely find time or much inclination for any novel-reading at home; it is at the seaside that draughts of this light sparkling beverage, this champagne of literature, are taken and enjoyed by them. It is all part of the change; and many a clear fresh spring in the heart's depths is thereby freed from leaves which choked it, and set to run pure and bright again. Your old love-ecstasies and agonies; your

old young dreams of noble aims and attainments ;
that sweet, if unreal time,

“ When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green,
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen ;”

these, the pure, wholesome novel, read in your holiday, will often pleasantly bring back again. And there are arrears of such, stale to others but new to you, to be made up. One of them, perhaps, the Wife then is reading or running over ; and so the old ones are comfortable. The boys are busy over the rigging of that ship that was a little faulty in sailing to-day, but that to-morrow is to be quite perfection. The children find an unfailing source of delight in the balcony. There is (only of course you don't know of this) the excitement of leaning over and trying to catch a sight of the inmates of the next room ; there is the interesting appearance of a baby in the adjoining balcony, and of other children who shyly ogles them. On the other side (innocent that you are in your arm-chair) Gerald has actually popped his leg over, and run across the balcony, unspied by an old gentleman who was dozing over his port.

But another morning has found you yourself a bather. Own it or not as you like, certainly there *is* a secret apprehension about this first entrance *in propria persona* into the salt sea. You want to be warm beforehand, but you mustn't be over hot. You come just at the proper temperature, and, with a slight inward flutter, ask when there will be a machine ready ? You find, perhaps, that there are only twenty waiting, and that, by great good luck, you may have half a double machine in two hours ; or possibly you are

happy enough to find that yours can be the next turn but one. This is about right ; it would have been a *little* startling to find that you were *at once* to be carted off and flung into the deep. So you sit on the sand, and draw your book from under your arm, and bask in the fervent sun. *Very* soon, it seems, your turn comes. A dry strip of carpet is thrown upon the floor of the machine ; three towels are stowed into a corner of the seat. You bolt the door by which you entered, and are, after one warning bang, instantly shot forward against the further opening. Happily, that too was bolted, and the space was circumscribed. You recover yourself, and with firmly-set legs and extended elbows commence the process of undressing. You are rather glad that the journey to the sea is somewhat long. There is something of a cold-blooded feeling in the undressing while the hungry water flops about the wheels, impatient for its prey. At last the halt is made, and you stand upon the threshold. You asked for a good plunge, and sure enough the swell washes and laps over the top step. It looks rather terrible ; so grey, deep, and cool, you can't make up your mind for a minute or so ; but after all the thing must be done. Here goes. You take a deep breath, a headlong plunge, and emerge, gasping and happy. The ordeal is over, the enjoyment begins. So you swim out into the calm depths, and reluctantly leave the now friendly and good-natured element after your full quarter of an hour (for you bathe for health, not only for pleasure), and stand dripping and glowing on the step.

The wife is waiting for you on the Parade. She also has had a dip, and you go together for a pleasant constitutional, striking a little inland, taking thin diagonals across the hedge-framed fields. Here are beans with their green gloves on, a little point of the

leather sticking out at the end of each stiff finger ; here the ripening canary-seed cones making a variety from the familiar barley or oats ; here a wide field,

“ Where thick with white bells the clover hill swells,
Far down to the full-toned sea.”

Then another morning may well be devoted to the sands—ay, many another morning. I do not mean to suppose that my client cares to become one of the swarm on that human fly-paper to which those sands immortalized by Frith may be aptly compared. No ; he likes to wander away from the throng of men, probably with Beatrice and Eva now, and submits to become transformed with them into specimens of Leech’s ‘ common objects by the seaside.’ At first it is enough to pace slowly the slants of washed white glittering sand, and to pick up very common objects indeed. Here he pauses at a strewing of many sea-treasures in a far-stretching strip. So clean and spick and span new the pebbles and the little chalk marbles are, that they please at first, just as the daisies and buttercups when fresh in the spring, although soon, like these, passed by for rarer discoveries. But now those purple periwinkle shells gain their meed of notice, and those of soft, bright yellow are quite prizes ; and the little cowries are picked up and the cones of spar, and the black skate’s eggs, and the pel-lucid pebbles—agate, if not diamonds, of course. Thus Coventry Patmore’s bride :—

“ Her feet, by half a mile of sea,
In spotless sand left shapely prints ;
With agates, then, she loaded me
(The lapidary called them flints).

And the dry, long fringes of whitey-brown sea-weed, or those of the same colour but broad-fronded, flat,

and sweet-scented when drying. Then, of course, the great find of the cuttle-fish, which is so good for tooth-powder, though no one ever yet knew anybody who had tried it ; and still more ecstatic, hailed by a cry of delight from both girls, the mass of brown-yellow seaweed, depending from the strong, leather-like stem, round and lithe. This is carried off in triumph, to act as a weather-glass, and will hang for many months, no doubt, in the pantry of the little inland home, no longer supple and beautifully wet and gleaming with sea, but mouldy and shrunk and shrivelled and marred.

However, Madam Beatrice, the enterprising and the lover of change, has been for some time impelling her father to explore the wide-stretching tract of low chalk rocks, overgrown with dark slippery weed. He nothing loth, the trio leave the firm, dry slopes, and cross the ribbed moist sand, and gain the slippery terrace—a realm of new and inexhaustible delights. What a fund of amusement at first for you all (it is more convenient, I find, to address my readers) in merely walking on these fat pods, and hearing the profuse pops. But you go on to higher and more intellectual delights, slightly dashed, for a moment or two, by Eva's slipping over the ankles into a concealed store of water ; but then no one ever takes cold with sea-water, and, see, Beatrice has lit upon one of those wide, clear, delicious sea-pools. Quite a little lake it is, and what a field (rather to mix the simile) for exploration ! How exciting to watch the live stock which inhabit it—those rapid shrimps ; that quite big olive-shelled crab, scuttling across the pond sideways, and hiding within the weedy fringe ; and this tiny white fellow, burrowing so hastily into the sand. Then the miniature groves of all-coloured sea-weed, the lovely scarlet, the rich bronze, the deep green, all so

beautifully spread, far better than hours of paper and pinwork could effect. Oh, how melancholy to see the wet lump which it looks when extracted—that fringe of vermilion, just now, wide-spread and undulating in the movements of this tiny sea! one is never weary of watching the wonderful beauty and music-motion of the rich-hued sea-growth, seen to such advantage picked out upon the clean white sand. Then there are the limpets stuck so obstinately on these chalk rocks patched about with straight and thin green hair; and the treasures to be found—those delicate, long valves, lying snugly within the channels that they have somehow bored with their frail instruments in the soft chalk. But chief of all, perhaps, those fleshy animated flowers, the sea-anemones, wide open and vivid in hue, and basking in the sun. And so back over the popping weed, laden with treasures, to the more than ever welcome dinner.

Indeed there is so much to do that I might weary the reader before I had set down a fourth of the items of enjoyment which so quickly pass the short three weeks at the sea. That person has been indulgent so far, because there is a pleasure in recalling pleasant days; and the simple programme of the seaside holiday is much the same for all. And if you can't this year get within hearing of 'the longed-for dash of waves,' why, it is something to find in some book upon your shelves the little vignettes sketched, and the little incidents indicated, and the divers trifles set out, that at the sea prevent leisure from being idleness, and that give full employment, although no toil; change of occupation; absence of any compulsory work, whether of conscience or of necessity. One wouldn't care to have a *very* long spell of such a life of trivialities, though they may harmlessly be of deep

interest for the few holiday weeks : hence three weeks are more of a holiday than three months, at the sea. You could not without uneasiness give up so large a tract of ground to the poppies ; and thus at the very beginning you would be sketching out some plan of graver work. At least your reading (if you be a clergyman) would be divinity instead of novels. But you feel that you have earned this short and soon-fleeting time of employed idleness ; you feel that yourself and your parish too will be the better for it. Why, take the case of a horse that has got poor and tottery, and below its work, is it wasting its time when it is turned out for a month to grass, and to munch its feed of corn every day ? Nay, doesn't it trot along and do double the work—double in quantity and better in quality—when it gets into harness again after the recess ?

And so with you. Don't be ashamed if Miss St. Bile should see you on the sands with your little ones and look askance. Go on with that famous sand castle that you are so busy with, and (let it be frankly confessed) so eager about,—for it is not, honestly, *only* "amusement for the children." Dig the moist firm sand, pile and pat the citadel, the flanking walls ; sink the moat deep, and scoop out chambers in the castle. Then watch, with excited interest, those waves lapping nearer and nearer : now, great event ! the moat is filled ; now the subtle enemy undermines and openly attacks, rushing in through a breach, and the wet sand settles down to smoothness again.

Or go, with Harold and Ambrose, to try that new craft that they have built or (somewhat aided surreptitiously, by you) have just bought. Stand by the wide rippled pool, hardly the least excited of the party, almost longing yourself to launch the white-sailed gallant vessel ; running round eagerly to the other

side of the water, rejoicing in seeing her scud, leaning sideways in the wind, swift and true, straight to the smooth shelving shore to which she is bound. Wander with them over those slopes of dry herbage, blue with bugloss, or pink with valerian, after the painted lady, or any other butterfly, moth, or beetle, that they may want just now. Go out, elate, armed with pointed hammers, to search for fossils in the rock or in the chalk, and be the search for ammonites and stone sea-eggs the great business of life for you at such times.

Forget for the while (you shall remember all again in due season), the lapse to the meeting-house of Biddy Williams; the three months' course of sick visits at one bedside, where you could never get any answer brighter or more confiding than 'yes,' and 'no;' the little misunderstanding with the principal farmer and churchwarden; the quarrel with the old choir because you refused to allow the Advent Hymn to be sung to the tune of Rory O'More. Forget all these little worries, which had assumed exaggerated proportions, and stand upon the step with the children, waiting for the donkeys to come up, and sharing in the anxiety that 'Jem Crow' or 'Robin Hood' may have been secured for this or that excited aspirant to-day. Tuck the two tiniest cosily in their goat-chaise, and be not ashamed even to accompany them for a turn or two up and down the Parade. Take the wife and the girls out for some glorious expedition. You driving in an open trap, and the boys mounted on their ponies, and delighting to gallop past you, or to race with each other. Attend the sweet solemn cathedral service (I am supposing Canterbury, now as your goal): go over the building afterwards—not, if you can help it, 'with verger clad;' visit the Dane John, St. Martin's Church, and St. Augustine's

College. Then resort to the 'Rose,' and pitch into that huge half Cheshire peculiar to hotels, and into the new crisp-cruled bread, and flank the repast with foaming Bass. Back again, a little quieter, the noisy mirth hushed, but serenely happy and content.

Again, take a boat ; let wife, boys, girls, enter unsteadily, and stow themselves where they may ; let the lines and the bait be ready, and launch over the rattling pebbles into the smooth deep water. How clear it is ! as you lean over the side, you

" See the deep's untrampled floor
With green and purple seaweeds strown."

You can discern the wavy ridges, into which the brown sand is moulded. You put your hand into the green, glassy surface ; the water parts from your wrist in a smooth transparent curve ; the boat leans, and your arm is wet to the elbow. But before this you have buckled to an oar : now Harold, and now Ambrose has taken stroke from you : half an hour of the unwonted exercise has, however, made you feel glad that the fishing-grounds were reached. Then all is important bustle and excitement. Girls and boys too have each a baited line. The float bobs ; mother and father watch, anxious as the intent angler himself ; suddenly it ducks beneath the surface, and the hauled line reveals a tiny wriggling dab, or perhaps a small whiting, or maybe an eel, nigh impossible to be handled. Even these may please at first ; but soon they become too common, and familiarity breeds contempt. The excitement is reawakened and redoubled when the happy Eva lands a fine grey mullet, weighing at least a pound, upon the deck. You don't care for dabs after *that* ; the interest, if less continuous, becomes deeper and more absorbing ; you

need not have taken that book to read while the children were fishing.

Home, after fair success. See, now you have got more into the swing of the rowing ; the boat flies over the water ; you soon leave the long line of solitary cliffs and unpeopled sands, for the shore dotted with stragglers ; for the bathing-machines, the crescents, the Parade, the Jetty. Pleasantly had wife and daughters been singing old songs, as, in a rhythm of motion you bent back and leant forward—

“ Our voices keep tune, and our oars keep time.”

This song was both sung and acted. Well pleased you wend your way to your lodgings ; and Mrs. Fruin cooks the fish for dinner.

But the Parade in the evening deserves at least one word. There is the band, of course, and there is a dense assemblage of the whole visitor population gathered about it when it plays ; promenading up and down during the pauses. It is amusing to note the company. As I said, you would rather not be bothered with any acquaintances by the seaside. Still you get to know and name people after your own fancy ; and perhaps, year after year returning to the same watering-place, you are pleased to recognise them again. What a perfect model of Mr. Mantalini, for instance, I remember to have for several summers met at a seaside place ; and by this appellation he was always known among ourselves. I wonder if the same thought had struck others. But you pass and repass the same groups of stragglers on these evenings, until you begin to expect in the turns this one or that one again. Here comes the pretty face that you learn to look for and like to steal a glance at as she passes ; here the spick-and-span clergyman who

always looks as if he had been just taken out of a bandbox; here those three young men with the astounding coats and trousers; here that tall lady in the green shawl; here that thorough old paterfamilias. The boys are in high enjoyment; they have given you the slip, but you meet their merry, roguish eyes now and then as you pace up and down. At last 'God save the Queen' announces the end of the evening's entertainment, and the band strikes its encampment, and marches off. The numbers on the Parade decrease; there are some twos and threes for the close and serried ranks.

You linger still for some time with your little party. The evening is clear and cool; the sea an azure green, crisping all over into the cleanest white crests; the tall vessels pass majestically along the horizon; the tiny pleasure-boat's white sails are picked out distinct against the now purpling water. The sun sinks lower, the clouds grow resplendent. What a sunset! But even as you watch he dips and drowns, and the unearthly lustre dies out; the clouds lose their vividness, but keep their glow; the sea becomes pallid and grey. The evening star keenly sparkles or burns in the steel-blue sky. The crescent is alive with warm, lamplit windows. The chains of gas have long been wound about the streets. You are nearly the last out. Your window shall no longer gaze with lustreless eye on the sea. You leave the Parade for supper and for bed.

But I remember I have promised a note or two about the Sundays at the seaside. How different they seem from the home Sundays to every one, much more to our country clergyman! You try the Parish Church one morning, and the Mariners' Church in the evening. Next Sunday there are yet two others to visit. In one you were disgusted by finding

perhaps, that you had to pay at the doors, as at a theatre, for seats; or you had to stand, with a long crowd of others alike forlorn, in the aisle between the high pews until some time after the service had begun. At last the doors of certain empty pews were opened to you. Long galleries—a three-decker—bad music; a general coldness and absence of any heartiness or external aid to devotion. You feel that you may go further and fare hardly worse at least. Then in the evening you happen upon a church without pews or pew-opener. Pleased, you take your seat. There is a heartier appearance here certainly. How richly the coloured glass burns and glows out of the hushed grey of the arches and walls. Clear voices singing a hymn are heard drawing nearer; a procession enters the church; the congregation rises. Ah! this is one of those Ritualistic churches, is it? At any rate, however staunch a Protestant you are, you feel that the contrast with the morning's service is surely favourable. Indeed, who would not prefer beauty and warmth to starvation and baldness in externals, but that, not always without reason, there is a fear lest, under the gorgeous ceremonial, there should be an attempt to smuggle in some of the errors in doctrine, of Rome?

It seems strange, in the seaside church, not to see the familiar faces, nor to be carried on in the usual routine of the home services. It seems strange to the clergyman not to have to read over or think out his two sermons, nor to hurry off to his school; strange to be sitting as one of the congregation with wife and children. Strange also—if he has been hunted up, and prevailed upon to assist in the service:—strange to look upon the sea of faces, not one of which is known, except by sight, to him. After such service performed, he is amused, in the week, by the

side-look and half-audible whisper, 'That's the clergyman who preached at St. Peter's last Sunday.' He becomes a sort of lion for the time of his stay.

But that stay comes to an end. Again the corded boxes, the bundle of spades and fishing-rods, the rugs and coats, are piled for the journey. Many treasures are now on their way home. There will be these to show, and all the events of the long absence to talk about for a good time to come. And though there is not the wild glee in the young hearts, and the excitement in the older, yet there is nothing at all of dullness. How much there will be to see, every one thinks, when they get home ; and everything will be so new again ; and it will be so delightful to greet the dear old trees and to see how the flowers have grown. The journey is very pleasant : its charms are not so new as at first ; but then it is delightful to look out for the familiar points again. And for the father of the family, why, he is quite another man. The worries that seemed to him so big have wonderfully decreased in magnitude ; the work that had got to fag him so is entered upon with pleasure and alacrity. His spirit and body are full of new energy ; his mind seems full of new or fresh ideas. It was, I say, as advantageous for his people as for himself that he got this thorough change. How pleasant to see the old familiar faces, as the fly winds through the village : how home-like every field and tree looks. And as he hands out his wife and girls, and having seen after the luggage, enters the dear old garden and the cosy rooms, the heart of each and all glows and expands, and there is vehement kissing, and a unanimous verdict, "Well, I declare it is delightful to be at home again, after all?"



No. III.

A DAY AT BOX HILL.

AMONG the disadvantages with which painters with the pen have to contend, must certainly be classed the limit of the materials at their command. There are not many kinds of cereal ; there are not many kinds of tree familiar enough to the public mind for fit planting in an essay : the generations of well-known flowers have their soon-reached bound ; streams and lakes have been often described, and the most you can do for them is to turn what has been already said concerning them into a new aspect or a different arrangement. Hills and mountains, woods and groves have been spoken of by writers before Moses' time ; and there have been watchers and tellers of star-beauty and cloud shapes, and sunsets and sunrises ; and sketchers of green spring-bits, and chestnut autumn landscapes ; admirers and describers of the softly-falling snow, and of the grey winter fields, also of the leafy summer affluence,—as long as singers sang, or writers wrote. Before Homer, men had doubtless said all (we might have thought), that had to be said, about the thud and thunder πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης ; before Æschylus there had been appreciation of and efforts to produce in words,

“ ποντίων τε κυμάτων
ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα. ”

"the many-twinkling smile of Ocean," as Keble has best translated it. The sound of wind ; the glimpse of lightning ; the song or the early twitter of birds—writers and singers have rung the changes on these once and again since the opening of the world's history. Our materials are, I assert, upon the whole, limited ; upon eight bells, as it were, each has to ring his special change. And I suppose there is some individuality, some peculiar trick in the ringing, that *does* give a certain sense of novelty, or, at least, agreeably varied oldness, to the peals, alike, but different, which the ever-changing succession of ringers evolves out of the same old bells, in the same old belfry.

Or, to give a somewhat wider scope, see how few really, and soon counted, are the keys of that piano, the strings of that harp. Yet how endless the combinations of melody which have been, and which shall be, produced from them ! But, think now of those twenty-four letters of the Alphabet ! I have (as a child, let me apologetically say), mused sometimes as to whether all the possible changes might not, by some one person, be mechanically rung on these, or rather on many assortments of the words which they compose ; all the possible combinations attained ; all the poems written, and all the stories told. Fancy the curious watching for the few prizes among the many blanks. Fancy the emotion of turning out the "May Queen," or "Evelyn Hope" (I take smaller and seemingly more possible cases), a "poem round and perfect as a star," out of the heap of chaotic jargon and broken scintillations ! But I have learned this much as life went on, that my scheme, (surely not more absurd than the Darwin-lunacies of the day ;) however brilliant in conception, was not quite feasible as to execution. And that there is every likelihood of sufficiency of employment

yet, for Poets and story-tellers, and (I hope) Essay writers, too, as long as this world lasts. In these days, which reduce all the poetry of labour to dull machine work, these workers shall thresh their corn with their own flail, and toss their hay with their individual fork. And this albeit in our farms that dull, headaching thrum has taken the place of the old early-heard and monotonous lulling beat upon the muffling straw; and albeit in our meadows the whirligig concern drawn by a horse has driven away the slowly advancing ranks of the haymakers, male and female, in favour of a display that seems an insane Catherine wheel, only whirling hay for fire. We can't do *everything*, I am thankful to say, by machinery; there will be infinite new combinations, notwithstanding the original material may have its limit; else, how could the world go on?

Still, what a wonderful scope the first writer had before him! No commonplaces; all the material untouched; plagiarism impossible; new combinations unnecessary. "Leaf" and "grief," and "love" and "dove;"—nay, even "breeze" and "trees," were new rhymes then!* Fancy that, ye poetasters! Even in rhymes we seem to detect a craving for some new thing, else why the forced efforts with which our time is rife? But a Chaucer, what a treasure-house of untouched wealth lay at his feet!

And yet we may well own that there are advan-

* "They ring round the same unvaried chimes
 With sure returns of still expected rhymes,
 Where'er you find the 'cooling western breeze,'
 In the next line it 'whispers through the trees,'
 If crystal streams 'with pleasing murmur creep,'
 The reader's threatened (not in vain) with 'sleep.'"

tages as well as disadvantages in having predecessors ; and they who follow after that first sickle-sweep into the breadths of virgin corn have the benefit of improved instruments ; of matured method ; and no doubt we have a vantage ground in being inheritors of the Past, and ought to make some noble advance, beginning where our fathers left off.

“ I, the heir of all the ages, in the foremost ranks of time.”

Still, where *they* had a harvest, a gleaning merely does seem, in some measure, left to us. So the Wizard of the north, *apologetice* :—

“ A lonely gleaner I,
Through fields time-wasted, on sad inquest bound,
Where happier bards of yore have richer harvest found.”

Well, all this tirade is to be excused as follows :— I was wending my way through the barley-fields, late in June, and fancies, according to their wont, were, scarce consciously, waiting to be woven into some pattern, taking the barley-stalks, or other surrounding inanimate company for the woof. And I smiled as, in answer to their importunity, I asked myself what new thing can remain to be said concerning a barley-field ? Its waves of light and shade ; its silky tossing ; its bearded ears ; its martial appearance, bristling so gallantly with numberless spear-points—all the changes had been (surely) rung.

But yet, is it so ? Do not new ideas or new fancies, in new heads, or in old heads at new times, connect themselves with even the most commonplace and often beheld scenery of life ? And so to me, on this day of which I write, a fancy did come fluttering light and eccentric as a white butterfly over the million ears of the bending barley. I was thinking

of holidays, and of the old time when life seemed to be all a possible if not an actual holiday. And I thought how that time was, and is not ; how that gleeful Spring tones down inevitably into a very quiet Summer. This train of thought was either suggested or helped on by the broad barley acres which were divided by my thin corn-path. For I noted how a change had come over them since I threaded it some few weeks ago. The silky floss, the changing sheen, the ceaseless chasings of light and shade were gone ; the silver-lilac, shot with palest sea-colour, that the newly-fledged ears upturned to the sky ;—all these were of the past. The grey light of the easily reflected heaven ran over the field no more in eager race—the awns were every one turned down to earth now.

And, methought, is there not in this change a moral for some melancholy Jaques ? Heads bend, let the cynic say, as soon as there is something in them. 'Tis but in the empty flower-time that they can afford to hold them up, stirred by every lightest breath into that toss of glee, that continuous ripple of light and life and laughter. Heads bend, of barley and of men, when they begin to fill ; and in our maturity we look downward as we walk ; meditative, moralizing, careful, sedate, sad. Some glad child-hearts still, as the exception, remain under old heads, but, as the rule, the holiday heart, and the holiday time, go as life advances ; and the thronged streets of busy cities shall more remind you of the weighed-down ears than of the careless waving awns. Grave men and women !—ah well, seldom it may be, but yet indeed sometimes, even to these that old holiday-feeling comes back, and then it is, you see, that a poppy burns out of the corn.

For I must not depart too far from my title. Let

them bend, the ears of corn, the serious, heavy ears ; we have to do with poppies now. And you know that these always look up gaily till their hour is past, and a light wind scatters on this side and on that the scarlet flaunt of their wings. And in the gravest life at its gravest period there will yet surely sometimes be some of these flowers. "Stop, and consider," says the poet :—

"Stop and consider ! Life is but a day ;
A fragile dewdrop on its perilous way
From a tree's summit ; a poor Indian's sleep,
While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep
Of Montmorenci."

But life, he perceives, has another aspect : catching sight (no doubt) of some flowers amid even the blighted and unhealthy corn—even among fancies which are morbid and diseased :—

"Why so sad a moan ?
Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown ;
The reading of an ever-changing tale ;
The light uplifting of a maiden's veil ;
A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air ;
A laughing schoolboy without grief or care,
Riding the springy branches of an elm."

But the over grave is less unwise than the frivolous and over light view of life. Oh terrible irony of that awful inscription on a tomb in Westminster Abbey,—

"Life is a Jest, and all things show it ;
I thought so once, *and now I know it.*"

Ah ! we feel how, on the contrary, thou hast now at last realized Life's terrible and eternal Earnest ! Still (for I have moralized enough), there are for us all, moods in which this grave life seems a sadder thing even than it really is. And there is nothing better, for the brisking up of a mind that is thus getting

flat, than as it were to pour it into another vessel by taking a day's genial outing somewhere. And for such outing the pic-nic class is a good one to select from. And in such selection the Londoner, or the near-Londoner, can hardly do better than decide on Box Hill, near Dorking, Surrey.

Let me turn back the pages of life's volume, and stop at some of the pictures that have found place in it here and there. Let me recall those old days at Box Hill, those pic-nics of the past. For often have I visited it; often, but at wide intervals of time: as the madcap child—(life's quick pendulum first set swinging)—as the youth, with tender heart for love, poetry, all things beautiful and noble; as the grave man—life's pendulum settled down into its steady, sober monotony. And as I look back and summon those memories, see, they come like a crowd of boys bursting out of school for a half-holiday: pushing and jostling for precedence—(these the younger ones), those of later life following with more quiet step. Each shall bring his contribution to my pen, which shall indeed, blend here many that really were separate. For I had better go there now as a grown man; and as for the children that tire not,—straining up that hill upon whose ascent I like at times to pause; and the youth that follows the maiden,

“With her loitering foot,
Hearing one behind it,”

—these, that I bring with me, and upon whom I smile benignly, are, I well know, old selves. Opened bud, and shed blossom, but coming back fresh, and white, and vermeil at certain times in life, as though the year had not turned, and it were yet sweet Spring or earliest Summer, and not a dry crumpled green leaf had yet littered the grass; nor any fern, before

the withering time, had nevertheless begun to grow ragged in the fernery.

How delicious were those old drives to Box Hill ; drives, of course, in open carriages, for this was, and still remains, the best mode of conveyance to such a place and on such an occasion. The month,—sweet, uncertain June, or mature but still capricious July, or grave and matron August. The day, how eagerly expected, and anxiously speculated upon ! There was a reddish sunset the night before ; this gives ground for hope. But, lo ! there has been a shower in the night ; the flag-stones in front of the house (at Clapham, say,) are wet and brown : there is a dull, brooding gloom over the sky at six of the morning. The hopeful one of the party detects a faint gleam in the horizon ; the despondent member quotes gloomily the old distich : “Light glaze makes wet days.” A feeling of uncertainty pervades the early breakfast ; however, the preparations are continued ; hampers are finished off, and various etceteras crammed in ; presently in very truth, the carriages are at the door, the packages stowed ; the children, like a bunch of bigaroon cherries, are soon huddled on one seat, impatiently expectant of father and mother, or elder brothers and sisters, or specially honoured guests to take their places on the best side ; these enter ; shawls are tucked away, umbrellas and parasols sent in for by this and that distracted maiden : the low carriage door is slammed, and with hilarious triumph the little ones find the older and more prudent quite committed to the day’s pleasure. Just then the sun bursts out ; the blue rift in the sombre sky widens to a patch ; umbrellas and parasols are soon in requisition, not for shelter but for shade, and before six miles have been traversed the whole width of heaven is one scarcely flecked azure field. And now the great question is,

will the Grenfields be there in good time ? nay, will they be there at all ? Old Grenfield is terribly nervous about rain, and there was that shower in the night, and certainly at one time the day did look unpromising enough. And it had been agreed that there should be no start if the day were wet. So there is much speculating, and sundry sanguinary threats of cruel chaff, to be visited on the defaulters, if their caravan, such a component part of the day's delight, should prove to have been fainthearted.

Meanwhile, how much there is to look at, and to take in with unmixed enjoyment. The father (a City man) has had hard work lately, and long office hours; the treat has thus been for some time put off; even now business had to be rudely compelled to stand aside and make place for this one day. And for this one day enjoyment is to be supreme. How delicious the gradually increasing affluence of leafage ! Not just a spindly tree or sickly avenue here and there among staring rows of white houses, but lush, ferny banks, shadowed with far-reaching canopies of Oak, Elm, Beech, Willow. How pleasant the stretches of smooth vivid park and meadow-land ; how clean the dotting sheep ; how sedate and at leisure the scattered cows ! Ah ! here is Beddington Church : grey and set in grave dark Elms, a perfect little village Church ; and see, a wedding party is leaving the porch ; there is a blithe strewing of flowers, and lo ! on a sudden a half laughter and half sobbing of bells peals out from the belfry-bars into the sweet summer day. This is left behind ;—the dark wide-spreading Yew in the background, and glad and light against it, the white-clad procession moving along the winding path between the still crosses that in that Christian churchyard stand sentinel to the sleepers ; moving slowly on towards the gate in the broad low wall. There the

carriages are waiting ; and the strange delight of that first association as man and wife,—separate from the outer world, snug together ;—is ready for Bridegroom and Bride at the slam of the carriage door. But they were still pacing along the Churchyard path, when the pic-nic party turned the corner round Beddington Park, and lost sight of them.

Beddington Park, alas ! now it is parcelled out into building ground, and the stately Chestnuts so long secluded in aristocratic grandeur, lighting up every year with endless tapers for the festival of Spring,—dropping pattering nuts in the silence of the expectant deer underneath their shade, when Autumn called upon them for a contribution to its universal food-stores ;—these lordly holders of the land, so long resident apart from the *profanum vulgus*,—alas ! now they are compelled to endure small parcels of upstart gardens run up to their very shade ; and to see new white villas trespassing on the grand and immemorial privacy of the stately park. But in the old Box Hill days they reigned supreme,—an oligarchy, an aristocracy ; and how pleasant to whirl by, just high enough to see over the park palings ; and there were, sure enough, the grouped and straggling deer, fallow deer ;* and that vast, ugly, red mansion, that was yet venerable, as having lodged Queen Elizabeth ; also as having one of its wings shut up, and, of course, haunted. Now, this too is smartened up and utilized ; I dare say it is better thus, but there is in it also somewhat sad to the heart which has yet an artist and antiquarian element ; and the glaring new building makes the grey old Church beautiful now by contrast, as before by affinity.

* Happily, since the above was written, the Park is bought up, and the deer restored, by the Rector of Beddington. I hereby tender him my thanks.

However, while we muse, the carriages have whirled on, and they are passing through Carshalton. That was at the time when the Willows were still the glory of the place, and what a treat is found for our Londoners in their yellow bending masses ! One drooping right over the road as they rattle through a shallow stream crystal clear ; two in front of the Rectory ; several, and a dark-armed cedar enhancing the gold of their tresses, in the Grove and by the square pond opposite the Church ; and one alone on an island in the sister pond ; another at the corner by the Churchyard. These all vanished long ago, but they stood in the old days, and will be pleasantly remembered by many a reader.

But we must roll on more quickly through Sutton, Cheam, Ewell, Epsom ; and then take the drive more leisurely as the woods about Ashstead are reached. For here the children are scarce restrainable ; there are secret copses, hushed and mysterious ; there is the cooing of wood pigeons, and now and then the startled flap of their ash-grey wings ; there is actually a squirrel racing across the wood path and up that tree ; and upon rounding suddenly the skirt of the wood the pheasants that were feeding in the field run across in full view to cover. Then the flowers ; those azure stars of succory, and that canary toad-flax, and the affluence of tall various grass ; these have worked the youngsters up to a frantic pitch hardly curbable. But *actum est*—the game is up,—when, as that clearing is passed, tree-enclosed, and fern-carpeted, there appears a stately spike of flushed foxglove spiring even above the tall deep brake. It would be simple brutality to disregard any more the desperation of the instant appeal to have the carriage stopped—and it is scamper off then with a vengeance. Reginald has secured the prize for Ethel, who bears back the tall sceptre in

triumph ; but another beyond has been spied, and yet another ; and there is the bracken to be pulled up, and cut through the stem near the root for the oak-tree picture ; and there is this flower and that oak-apple ; and, "Oh, just these young acorns !"—to be snatched ; until at last, tired with calling, and frantic as an old hen with her ducklings all over the pond, the elders give the order to drive on. Then there is the race of young legs, and the crowding up of the flushed faces and the escaped hair, and the examination of the prizes, and the sternly expressed determination of the parents, wiser if not sadder by experience, not to allow any more halts until the goal be reached.

And now indeed expectant heads are turned towards the front ; the lucky fellow who got the seat by the coachman is the more envied his wide and easy view ; for the whole caravan is on the *qui vive* for the sight of the first box-tree. And on a sudden, behold, here they are ! the carriages winding slowly up the ascent are closed in on both sides with box-trees *ad libitum* ; "not single spies, but in battalions." And now they wind along a path just close above a fearful precipice (so Blanche tells the nurse on their return) ; and the short-turfed slopes dip into valleys and rise into hills, reminding Bertram (to the admiration of his parents) of the hills on which the Philistines and the Israelites were camped, with the valley between. And under them now, and all about, glisten the box-trees, with their varnished small cup-leaves.

Yes, this was the old way in which we used to get to Box Hill ; the old way, and the pleasantest. If the drive took some time, why you see, it was a part, and no mean part, of the day's pleasuring. But now people can get to Box Hill by train : there is actually

a Box Hill station. 'Tis an innovation, and there seems an incongruity ; still I must not say much against it ; for I have of late myself tried this way too. A pretty station, with a peep of smoke-blue hill clothed with wood, to invite pacing feet to pause at the end of the platform ; leaving this, a pleasant walk along the quiet country roads, and past the gardened homesteads, and under the trees which branch across the road from the dark palings of private mansions ; all the while gradually ascending ;—until a little gate is reached, and suddenly and abruptly the hill rises above you ; the path winds up it inexorably ; the tug of war begins. Here it is that your limbs recall your mature or over-ripe years to your remembrance ; hence those pauses which are so frequently made during the ascent ; although, as you face round, with your hat off, and wiping your expansive brow—possibly your bald head—there certainly needs no other excuse for the halt than that which is at once supplied by the lovely scenery.

What a panorama it is, gradually unrolling before you as you reach point after point of the ascent ! You are looking down on those trees which just now were above you, and upon the roofs of those cottages beside which you have passed. But the young ones are impatient, and the old ones must trudge on. Ah, well ! 'tis done ; the summit is reached ; and you may afford to pick out a seat on the close dry turf, and rest for a bit. Delicious air ! Delicious view !

“ With eyes made bright by what they viewed
We emerged upon the mounded plain,
As to the breeze a flag unfurls,
My spirit expanded.”

Yes, you feel something of that opening and uncrumpling of the heart, anxious father ; seam-browed toiler ! The petty world seems less burdensome to your soul ;

its worries, and cares, and work, work, ceaseless work, slip away from your released mind just now. And it may well be that things that are good and noble, and high and divine, seem more possible to your heart, more in accordance with it. Thoughts of moral beauty, of things higher than the groove of usual life brings in your way, thoughts of, or akin to, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,"—such thoughts, if not called forth by the place, the tender beauty, the calm that surrounds you, and upon which you look down, yet do seem in harmony with this, and to underlie it as it were;—to be the words of which it is the music. And perhaps you are inclined to think, looking down at that little nest among the trees, with its green cool lawn, and its pattern of well-kept garden beds : that had you such a retreat, life would surely be less worldly than it is. That it would be easier to fulfil its great end : easier, being more out of the world, to think less absorbedly of the treasure that moth and rust will corrupt, or Death, the thief, break in and steal, and to set the heart more undistractedly upon that treasure that faileth not,—which no panics approach ; which is subject to no depreciation ;—which pays its steady interest of peace here,—with what a reversion hereafter not the shrewdest merchant nor the sharpest Stock Exchange man can even imagine. The parson can talk of it as an unknown quantity, but that is all he can do ; '*Eye hath not seen*'—the familiar words come with a refrain of music in your ears.

But a chorus of young voices comes about you ; "Father, you *must* be rested now ; *do* come along !" How little tact children have ; surely they might have fallen in with the obvious make-believe—and yet not only a make-believe—that you were absorbed in the view. However, you rise a little stiffly from

the old mole-hill on which you were sitting, and stand up, and look about. Ah well! no doubt, if you knew it, the owner of that cottage has his distractions too; in fact, we (who were early enlisted to be soldiers) have each his own life-long battle to fight; and if it's not with one enemy it is with another. Still, there is something in the neighbourhood of fields and trees, in place of long lines of hard, impressionless and changeless houses, that seems more compatible even with that beauty of holiness after which many sigh who do not strive. Hence partly the connexion—a pathetic and touching one as I think—in the minds of some business men, not satisfied with their life as it is, nor comfortable about it—the connexion of the hope of better things to come, with some sweet little country abode, in the later years when they shall have retired, and when (they hope, often vainly,) the world's importunities shall have drawn off their forces, and have left them a breathing time for the serious business of life—and of death. Alas! when the smoke-dried tree comes to be transplanted, 'tis too late, generally, to call back old freshness, or to evolve new greenery; it sickens in its new position, but dies at last yet more sere and yellow than when it was taken out of the city squares to be planted among the green fields.

Thus, perhaps, you muse, as you stand in the fresh air of heaven, far removed from the city smoke, upon the brow of Box Hill. It is all so new, so fresh, this is what pleurably strikes you; as instead of walking under the trees, you look down upon them. Strange, it seems, to see the expanse of leafage rippling away from your feet down the hill. You recall Arnold's lines:

“Merlin and Vivian stopped on the slope's brow
To gaze on the green sea of leaf and bough
Which glistening lay all round them, lone and mild,
As if to itself the quiet forest smiled!”

Here is plenty of twinkling box ; and every now and then a more eager air takes the branches of the Service tree, and blows them into silver.

But, I remember, all this while I have left one, two, or three carriagefulls from Clapham winding up the hill ; having, indeed, some time ago attained, no doubt, the summit ;—and that I never so much as handed the ladies out of the carriages. Well, they *have* got out somehow, and it was *my* loss, for here is sedate nineteen, and there sweet seventeen—and here pet fifteen, and plaything eleven. All bright and fresh and natural as hedgerow roses ; not at all “girls of the period ;” and if any artist drew them from imagination, I would thank him to omit the monstrosities of the present fashions, specially head-dress and bonnet, and to *indicate*, rather than *develope*, the prevailing style. They are not dowdies nor antiques, but they are not grotesque and outrageous ; and now they have been darting here and there about the soft turf, busy with a thousand new or, still more exquisite, remembered, delights. But for some time they have been anxiously peering about, and running to peep round the corners to see if “those tiresome Grenfields” are coming. And then they sulkily and poutingly aver that they are *sure* now that they will not come ;—why it is past twelve, and they were to have been here at eleven. And Percy : much he must care : at any rate *he* might have ridden over, if a shower a fortnight ago was enough to keep the rest away. So Ethel of petulant seventeen. But the more mature and quiet Enid demurs in her secret mind to that idea, and fancies that a dog-cart might have been found in which *two* could have been seated—and then John could have come with Percy. And thus they needlessly trouble their minds ; for (between you and

me, dear reader) *we* were the Grenfield party, as we got out on the platform and toiled up the ascent just now; and *you*, you know, were old Grenfield, when you stopped to wipe your bald head, and afterwards so unwarrantably dreamed on that turf-cushioned molehill. 'Tis you that have delayed the party at least a quarter of an hour; let us hope that your back will be broad enough to bear the burden which assuredly will be laid upon it.

All, however, is well when that promontory of box trees is rounded, and eyes light up with mutual and glad recognition, and there is the merrier greeting for the suspense, spiced with threats of the condign punishment which would have followed a defalcation.

But time passes on swallows' wings while the talk and the laughing goes on, and the boys begin to fidget and to look meaningly at their watches. At last obtaining attention, they prevail on the elders to do the same. "Why, it actually *is* past one o'clock!" And each and all suddenly awake to the consciousness of keen hunger. Come along: Reginald has found out just the place for the pic-nic; and, to be sure, it would be hard to better it. A smooth lawn of grass, semicircled by the wood, and looking down upon soft heathery slopes, and out upon far hills fitting in with farther hills; cool glades opening upon the skirting leafage, into which those who will may wander off when the meal is done, while those who will may lie at length in a pleasing tiredness, and enjoy the view.

So, now all is alacrity. The maidens busy themselves with the cloth-laying and the setting of knives and forks, also with the arrangement of the eatables, which the boys, for their part, help out of the rifled hampers, unpacking, with much relish, cold pies, chickens, lobsters, salad, ham, eggs, what not. Bottled

Bass follows next, sherry, claret ; and Reginald, great at Badminton, has carefully stowed away some ice in flannel, and some soda water, not even omitting a few borage-leaves. Ruddy cherries appear too, and early apricots, and late strawberries, and blooming grapes. All is at last complete. Each selects his plot of sward—this for the view, that for the shade, those for the neighbourhood of Ethel and Enid. Then some serious work commences ; girls and boys and old folks too, they feast in their new and spacious dining-room,

“ Like labourers, or like eager workhouse folk
At Yuletide dinner.”

How surprised that dyspeptic old fellow is to find that he can eat and enjoy so heartily ! How unromantically Enid has been fortifying herself with cold chicken and raspberry-and-currant tart, not to speak of etceteras. Well, such a hearty meal will have had its share in the benefit of the outing. What says Philosophy ?—

“ If to digest our food we should enjoy it, it should of course be taken leisurely and in a pleasant frame of mind. The cheerful society of friends should not be absent. Chatted food, the proverb says, is half digested.”

Hearst thou this, my dyspeptic friend ? Throw dinner-pills and pepsine wine to the dogs (I doubt, however, if they would touch them), and take wife and children out for a day to Box Hill ! You shall feed like a wolf, and digest like an ostrich, at least for one day. A kindly and a blithe heart makes the stomach's place a sinecure.

But see, the repast is over and done ; and Reginald and Herbert and Co. have marched off with some of

the empty bottles; indeed, Ethel and Enid are inclined to pout because John and Percy have found themselves unable to resist the potent spell, and have even joined the band of the sharpshooters. The thing is, of course, to fix the bottle well in the fork of a box-tree, or to insert a thin branch up the neck, and then having collected a stock of smooth round pebbles, to retire to a fair distance and fire away. And undoubtedly this is an exciting and pleasant employment. I shall not pause to moralize now upon the efficient cause of the enjoyment; I will only appeal to the unbiassed judgment of any candid man, youth, or maiden (Violet and Alice were among the marksmen) who has tried it, whether there is not a zest of delight and a glow of triumph when—yes—*your* stone flies straight to the mark? Pop—smash—you are the hero of the moment!

“How light the touches are that kiss
The music from the chords of life!”

I beg Coventry Patmore's pardon. Let me rather say, in plain prose, “What mere grown-up boys and girls we are even to the last; and what a trifle suffices to amuse a healthy mind and body!” For to require large matters—expensive toys—for amusement, is a sign of an ill-regulated mind, or of bile or stomach being out of order.

However, the bottles, even to the necks, are broken, and the whole party must seek occupation, each in his own way. Three pairs of lovers (Reginald has found an Alice among the Grenfields) stray away into the wood-paths—seductive, pleasant paths, with here and there the felled oak, stripped of bark, making a seat most convenient. But these we will not follow, using for our sunlight the same wise discretion ad-

vocated by Robert Browning in his moonlight scene :—

“ Hark, those two in the hazel coppice—
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please
Making love, say,—
The happier they !
Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,
And let them pass, as they will, too soon,
With the beanflower's boon
And the blackbird's tune,
And May and June !”

Let us turn to see what the younger ones are doing, free, as yet, from that “ wild, delicious pain ;” free as air, or as uncaught birds, or as a vine before it has put out tendrils. Violet and Dorrie and Rachel are half-way down the smooth-turfed hill, eager in the successful search for wild strawberries. Oh, the glee when one of any size is discovered !—not, though they be sweet, from any particular delight in the eating them, but chiefly from the charm of finding such eatables wild and open to whomsoever may come. In sooth, they are charming things at any time to find ; delicately bending, the vivid scarlet ripe fruit, rough with seeds ; the smaller green fruit-promise ; the delicate five-petalled white flower, with pale gold eye ; the triple ducal leaf. Then there is heath, and the pretty little blue or pink milkwort, and the frail, lovely, grey hairbells ; there are, too, tiny seedlings of box, also of ash, birch, oak, which are to be carried home as great prizes, and planted in the own peculiar garden.

The elders—those who are mature but not old—who having already a large store of love ready made in their homes, need not now to set up a manufactory—they amuse themselves mostly by sitting still, by

lying about at ease, and lazily enjoying the view ; something in the manner sketched by the poet :

“ On a little mound
Sat the three ladies ; at their feet
I sat ; and smelt the heathy smell,
Plucked hairbells, turned the telescope
To the country round : my life went well
For once.”

They would come well into the foreground of that landscape for which Keats demands that there be

“ Naught more ungentle than the placid look
Of one who leans upon a closed book ;
Naught more untr tranquil than the grassy slopes
Between two hills.”

These are the workers, and for them cessation from work is enjoyment and occupation enough, as they recline in the embrace of this delicious reviving air, and in the presence of these eye-resting woods and hills.

The old people also are content to sit quiet and to rest tranquil ; the scene and the air have their inspiring charm also for them. But they live very much in the past so far as earth's enjoyments go ; and I dare to say they are, for all they seem to sit so still, running about really, with those glad hearts and strong legs that are racing over the slopes after fruit, flowers, butterflies, beetles ; or they are threading the woods, alternating between those quarrels which (for a day) are such anguish, nay, such absolute despair, and those exchanges of fidelity which are so earnest, so sincere, that though all the world beside have changed and proved false, yet will these never.—Oh young St. Peter-hearts !

But this is pleasant, to see that genial pair, in the

quiet waiting time of life, in the twilight, but remembering what the sunshine used to be ; content

“ With looking on,—
Sit in the shade together ; while they gaze,
A cheerful smile unbends the wrinkled brow ;
The days departed start again to life,
And all the scenes of childhood reappear,
Faint, but more tranquil, like the changing sun,
To him who slept at noon and wakes at eve.”

However, the trysting-time draws near ; the straggling couples come in by degrees, trying to look unconscious of everybody's consciousness. Blanche and Rachel have secured some choice lepidoptera. The boys come up hot and absolutely tired, having gone easily down to the very foot of that thickly-wooded hill, and had the labour of ascent, struggling up from tree to tree. A last peep is taken into the thickets of box, so quaint and weird ; such bony, blanched stems and branches, leafless underneath and skeletonian, but springing into varnished green multitudinously above. A last look is given to the sweet landscape that is loveliest now because of the breaths of warm, rich sunlight, and the masses of shade ; because also of the single or parallel shadows that slant down the hill-side and take every bend and swell of the sward. Then telescopes, umbrellas, hampers are gathered together ; these groups get into the carriages again, and those descend the morning hill towards the little Station. For the carriage folk the drive, if not so *exciting* as in the coming, is yet very dreamily enjoyable. There is a serenity, a pleasant fatigue and languor ; there is also a treasure added to the stores of memory—that comforting or harrowing companion of our solitude. For what says the poet,

in lines the first only of which, I think, is hackneyed?—

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever ;
Its loveliness increases ; it will never
Pass into nothingness ; *but still will keep*
A bower quiet for us.”

And indeed all the stores are not taken in yet. A weirdness grows upon the landscape as the carriages roll on ; the twilight deepens ; heavy scents linger in the air ; the Moon gathers strength in the dusking sky.

“The twilight shadows grow,
And steal the rose-bloom genial summer sheds ;
And scented wafts of wind that come and go,
Have lifted dew from heavy clover-heads ;
The seven stars shine out above the mill,
The dark delightful woods lie veiled and still.”

But home comes at last, and the wreck of the meal for supper, and then bed. And all are wound up for a new spin ; and work has gained upon the whole, be sure, from this day's play.





No. IV.

SOME ANNALS OF A SKETCHING CLUB.

I HAVE noticed that nature often amiably falls into a kindly harmony with that particular idea which for the time has settled itself in the lodgings of the brain. The lodgings, this is a word of rather too long duration ; rather the Inn, let me say ; for the chambers of thought, though ever occupied, are continually changing their tenants. Sometimes the occupant is sad-coloured in garb, and gloomy in visage ; sometimes he wears a holiday suit ; oftenest, a parti-coloured apparel, like a member of the Zingari club, or the pied piper of Hamelin. Very common it is for these tenants to be but tenants of a day, or of an hour, or a minute ; they take the rooms, but are of a fugitive nature, and when they have gone are soon forgotten, and return no more. Some, especially the sombre-dressed parties, and one or two of the very gladdest of the holiday visitors, keep constantly recurring ; and there are cases in which a black-suited and melancholy-visaged tenant even takes up his abode, and secures life apartments there, or settles lower down in the heart. Still, it has been noted, these settlers do mostly change, as time goes on, their black for half-mourning ; and there *is* a recipe, if you do but find it out, for changing into a tender sadness only, features that at first coming bore nearly the impress of despair.

Well, I was going to say how remarkably nature strikes up an intimate acquaintance, nay, a brotherhood, with the brain's tenant, even though it be "a guest that tarrieth but a day." And this I found to be the case as, in a late summer walk, I was pondering the subject of this paper. There were the fields all being cleared and prepared for a fresh start next year : all earth's wide palette (it seemed to me) being scraped clean from the many colours which had been pinched out in big and little patches about it. That flake-white patch of the may-weed, or ox-eye daisy, which I remember to have noticed laid like a tablecloth (but this is to confuse my simile) over that field, 'tis all swept off, and stacked as pale-brown hay. Then the chrome-yellow of that strip of rape in flower ; the palette-knife has removed that in a clean swoop some time ere this. And now the ochre of the barley, the Indian-yellow of the rich wheat—into which, indeed, the vermilion of that bright poppy-field close by, had, you will observe, run and mingled—these are fast disappearing, leaving their place so bare, so bare. And that bright vermilion only lingers in little smears : also the crimson-lake of the saintfoin has departed, and the purple-madder of the clover. The cobalt of the flax is gone ; and the neutral tint of the lucerne ; and where the ultramarine possessed that lavender field there is a dull pigment akin to terra-verte. Where there are copses there will still be an abundance of sap green ; but here the mars orange of the maples, and the scarlet vermilion of the cherry-trees, and the dragon's blood of the dogwood, and the pale yellow of the hazels, and the deep carmine of the brambles, will soon all run into the greens, and form that pretty chaos which idle painters sometimes love to make of all the bright pigments which they sweep together on the palette—calling the effect a

fine instance of Turner's last manner—just before the thin, limp knife does its final work, and presto ! all the pure vivid hues and colours are gone ! And these will soon be gone till next year : and you shall see earth's palette just clean pale maple where the corn and hay had been ; until the plough again transforms this to rather dull mahogany ; and again the snow to porcelain.

But it was in the young spring days that our Club began ; the glad spring days ; all the colours only just squeezing out ; the brown tree-brushes just filling, and all the year's pictures to be painted upon the clear canvas of the land. Ah, how the very mention of the Spring carries us at once back to the young days of Life's brief year, that had yet all its pictures to paint upon the white canvas of the mind ! Canvas white, or with so much ground unoccupied, when we are young : such abundance of room for the new delicious touches ; and the early years have laid first sketchy tints which wait eagerly for each deepening and developing. It is not then as when we grow older, and there has been process after process of painting repeated on the canvas ; and these defined lines have grown blurred, and those pure tints dirty, and there has been, it is true, much labour and painstaking, much scraping and loading, and stippling, and finishing, and glazing, and varnishing ; but the sweet grace and delicious hinting and dim suggesting and ineffable promise of the first sketch has been lost. Lost ?—or buried ? to be recovered one day, one Spring Day, when the colours shall separate and fall into their places as by magic and the completed picture appear, with its own finish and yet with all the purity, and freshness, and promise of the young heart's first sketch.

It was, I say, in April that we met, and formed our Sketching Club, and fixed the rules and regulations. At a pretty country Parsonage it was, in a

room hung all over with paintings, like an exhibition room, and with a window that opened into a small Conservatory, always well arranged both as to composition and colour. Beyond, there was a pleasant lawn, a great tree in its centre, and shrubberies and woodland just waking into life about the landscape; hills beyond, with fan-shaped copses of appropriate brushwood wedged between them here and there. Just the place and day—a mild day that tempted you into the air, a day full of sweet indefinite promise—just the place and day to whet the appetite for sketching from nature. So the scheme was devised, and the rules drawn out. I don't remember much about them. There was, however, a President and a Secretary; and there were to be certain fixed days of meeting, say once a month; and at the end of each meeting the members present were to fix the next locality for our gathering. At the end of the year there was to be an exhibition of all the sketches; and if thought well, they might be exchanged or bought. There were some demurs to this last article, and I am not sure how it was settled.

Now the idea pleased me well; for many advantages seemed combined in the plan. There was society, for the solitariness of my former sketching days. There was the prospect of mutual improvement; for obviously the mind must narrow that is ever contemplating only its own conceptions and executions. There was the anticipation of divers pleasant days in the open air—days not of idleness exactly, but of agreeable and recreative change of employment. Then there was, for me, the grateful compulsion to keep up that old Art chapter in my life; those years of studentship at the Royal Academy, and that beginning of even Studio life, which I threw up so regretlessly when returning health made my

first dream of Oxford days and holy Orders again possible to be realized. That farewell seemed, indeed, an entire desertion of Art; for the care of a parish and the study of theology left little time for palette and brushes. But now here would be a kind of necessity laid on me to *make* time at certain periods for the attendance upon the neglected Muse. She was, as it were, to hold her Drawing-rooms, and we of the Court were bound to attend them. I remember also that we were allowed to present friends.

Where was our first gathering? Let me recall it, and give some notes of our after-meetings; and let me just touch in about the landscapes the figures of some of the members. Moreover, let me chat desultorily of certain superficial Art matters as I go on.

An old castle, then, was the first selection. A good selection too, for what more delicious to the painter's eye? Is it not Ruskin who says that a great colourist is known by his greys? Greys, that is, in everything; greys, for instance, that are cobalt almost in the rich sienna petal of the nasturtium. Hold one up sideways to the light, and you will see what I mean. But in a stone ruin we come upon grey *at home*, grey in its very stronghold. There are greys and greys: there is the rose-grey in the eaves of a mushroom; there is the sky-grey that runs over the field of young barley; there is the opaque glass-grey of the sea; there are shimmering greys about all foliage, and if you, ignorant of this, set to work with nothing but tints of green, you shall depict a mass of boiled spinach, but not the living trees which catch so many sweet sky-reflections. But, as I said, in a Ruin you come to the land of greys; on to their very fountain head; here you find them in infinite and exquisite variety, set in colour, intensifying it, and hushed and softened by it.

How delicious to the eye was this old castle, when on that warm May day (the first of our meeting), we came suddenly upon it, out of the thickening lanes! Such a soft air, with an unperceived mist in it; just mist, or, rather *double-air* enough to tone the lights and to cool the shadows, and to quiet the blue sky. No clouds, but a pearly atmosphere that hushed all that might have been glare. And the two round towers that stood up sheer above the smooth green slopes, against the pale tender blue! How (coming upon them with a prepared artist thought) they surprised with their beauty and filled the presumptuous mind with

“A vague, faint augury of despair.”

Paint them, indeed! What delicious chiaroscuro, such soft rounding, such gradations of pearly half-tone between the high light and deep shade! Then that rich dark-green scarf of the ivy thrown across one corner, and extending all along the wall, descending into a broad, flat trunk underneath the foliage. These Towers stood clear and strong, but as we (a friend and I, walking) came near, and ascended the hill, we found that there was fine artistic ruin in abundance:

“Here stood a shatter’d archway plumed with fern;
And here had fall’n a great part of a tower,
Whole, like a crag that tumbles from the cliff,
And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers;
And high above a piece of turret stair,
Worn by the feet that now were silent, wound
Bare to the sun, and monstrous ivy-stems
Claspt the grey walls with hairy-fibred arms,
And sucked the joining of the stones, and looked
A knot, beneath, of snakes—aloft, a grove.”

We were early, as became men in earnest—indeed, none of the rest of the party had arrived. But they

straggled in one by one, or two by two : here a dog-cart with *the* artist of the party ; here a trap with another clerical sketcher, and his wife ; here a light, easy, open barouche, with a bouquet of young girls in it, and another soon after. So we collect and chat, and separate, each choosing his or her favourite bit, or landscape.

A pretty scene ; a medley, something like that in the introduction to the "Princess." The grim old Ruin, stern and impotent as Giant Pope in the "Pilgrim's Progress ;" giving in no inch that it could help to Time the destroyer ; strong and brave yet in parts, and hiding its wounds with ivy. Here was the broken Chapel ; alas ! for the tracery of those nearly empty windows ! And how the floor had long ago fallen through, and a disused sawpit, itself now old and overgrown, yawned in the midst of the place that had been once so solemnly set apart, and that for long after sent up Matin hymns and Vesper prayers all the while the good knights and yeomen were away with their king, in France, Scotland, Palestine. Here was the cellar, a dark, damp place enough, but a capital retiring-room for the photographers of the party. Here were the ramparts ; rough, at the proper season, with the blue and pink bugloss, and now freaked with burnt patches of last year's polypody fern ; along which giddy path those two idlers are creeping and laughing, who ought to be hard at work washing in their sky. Here might be seen all these ; but where, I wonder, are the rooms in which Reginald Fitzurse, William Tracy, Hugh de Moreville, and Richard Brito slept, on their road to Canterbury to murder the stern, indomitable Archbishop ? For here it was that the Brocs, the lords of the castle at that time, received the vengeful Four.

A grim old Ruin, with grim old stories haunting it,

and buried within it ; but now you shall not fear a cross-bow bolt from one of those many slits in the grey (how well they come in, to enhance the rounded softness, as you just let the flat brush, filled with neutral shade, at the same time define and paint them !). No, they do but now serve for the ceaseless ingress and egress of incessantly chattering jackdaws ; and above these, on the battlements, the white and ash-coloured pigeons are nestling. Part of the old castle is inhabited now ; it furnishes, indeed, a peaceful Farmhouse ; and there are pens for ducks in the courtyard, and huddling sheep about the gateways, and great stacks of hay about the entrance, and patient, mild-eyed kine straying about the dry and shallow moat. And ancient Ash and Maple elbow familiarly the old walls. So near they grow that you might, I fancy, make your escape from a seeking party of soldiers—catching at that lithe ash bough, and swinging from branch to branch, your life depending on it, and—while the steel hauberks glance about the recesses within the castle walls, hunting you for the 1000*l.* laid on your head—swinging down at last to the delicious turf, and then mounting that led charger, and away, hurrah ! free as the wind ! But those times are past, and there is, as a matter of fact, no one in the courtyard seeking your life, even if there be in it, you feel nervously, “a fading flower” seeking your hand. And you are on the downhill side of forty, and the ash branch *might* snap ; and—upon the whole you had better shuffle ignominiously down the jutting stones, and go off quietly to your painting.

How pretty the scene is when you come down ! You are the privileged idler ; your painting is but a make-believe ; yet you are a connoisseur, and a pleasant fellow to make one of this picnic series ; and you

have an eye and a mind, if not a hand, for Art. When you were in the Alp scenery, and were just finishing a sketch rather more successful than usual—a tree-sketch, a sketch of pine-trees—you remember, and often relate, the innocent question of the guide. Pointing to your carefully-finished trees, at which you were glancing with pleased, head-on-one-side complacency, and whose growth to their present state of perfection he had stolidly, but with deep interest watched over your shoulder, he inquired (to render it into our polished vernacular), “But, sir, what be *they*?” Never mind; you found the scene better rendered by Matthew Arnold than the best of your club could have presented it; as thus—

“A green Alpine stream
Beneath o’erhanging pines; the morning sun,
On the wet umbrage of their glossy tops,
On the red pinings of their forest floor,
Drew a warm scent abroad; behind the pines
The mountain skirts, with all their sylvan change
Of bright-leaf’d chestnuts, and mossed walnut trees,
And the frail scarlet-berried ash, began.
Swiss chalets glittered on the dewy slopes :
Over all
Ranged, diamond-bright, the eternal wall of snow.”

But you are safely landed on the elastic turf, after your rampart excursion, and this is Spring and not Autumn; England, not Switzerland; and there is enough to look at here and now, without calling up pictures from the past or from other countries. I own, however, that, thus quoting, you have done me a service which I sought. For in this sketchy paper about sketches I want sometimes a study or a picture set, like a gem, here and there in the letter-press, wet and clear-coloured from the master’s hand. And no fear but I shall find a frame for them, every now and then.

But see how gracefully the groups have uncon-

sciously arranged themselves. How the bits of colour gleam out here and there, toned by the atmosphere, bringing the cool greys and dark greens and hushed blues to a focus. Here a pale maize dress, and a poppy scarf, with a black gentleman lying against it. Here a couple in gentian-blue, only softer tinted, carried off by the parasol of the same hue a little further on. A claret silk there, with somehow a fold or two of orange about it. The Sketchers themselves make a charming foreground to the landscape which they are transferring to the canvas.

Let us look over their shoulders. Here is that clerical Amateur of whom we spoke. He professes not to know anything about painting ; but surely we shall agree that such ignorance as his may be counted bliss. See how his drawing is already accurately put in, and now upon the clean block—paper rough as orange-peel, Whatman's best—he lays tint and colour pure and clear, and just leaves them as he laid them on. Such well-defined, exact shadows, and presently the clean tint drawn over them, and then left untouched. Not much finish, you perceive—more a suggestion than an achievement. But then how the suggestion, given with such ease and with such consummate taste, pleases, if it does not satisfy ; and what does finish, as a rule, accomplish ? Alas ! the clear, lucid tints might have been stippled into muddiness ; the seductive hints and alluring indications might have lost their mystery, and the completed picture be unfavourably contrasted with the reality with which it would then appear to challenge comparison ; the mind, the appreciative mind, can generally finish the picture better than the Artist can. Now, although those square, sharp-edged shadows, overlapping into half-tint, are not that wondrous and delicious softness of the ancient stone, rounding with

a tender gradation from the high light with little roughnesses of lower light and shade in the passing, yet there is something in the cleanness and the clearness, and the pearliness of the unmolested wash, that shall make amends for any commonplace finish. On the walls of the great exhibition at the end of the season this painter's contributions shall be all presented unfinished, but not rough; tantalizing, and herein owning part of their charm. Why did that grey bit of wall leave off just here, met by the untouched paper? and why was not that clear green wash further touched into ivy? Here is a luminous recess of deep shadow; and here an indication that might have grown into a figure; never a smear, but abrupt and tantalizing endings; as much white paper as colour when the sheet is stripped off the block.

This Artist never touches his sketches after he has left the original; he quite refuses all *home* work. Partly because he is also a careful and persistent student of theology, and the day's outing is ill spared, though beneficially spared, from study; and he lays the thing by as done with, directly he gets within the sphere of his parish, and the atmosphere of his books. Partly again, because he says—and herein I thoroughly agree with him—that the piece, whatever its merits may be, is always rather deteriorated, than bettered, by work done in the absence of its original. I have proved this myself, by transgressing the rule, and afterwards returning to finish the piece from Nature. Not only, I found, were little touches of beauty missed, that, had I been face to face with them, would have received due notice: but many that *had* been caught were now obscured, and, from absence of the original that would have explained them, certain subtleties had been swept away, and much of the truth and freshness of the scene lost.

What a charm there is about paintings begun and finished (or, next best, left unfinished) in the open air! Give me the simplest wayside study; a broken rock with ferns; a limestone bit with a straggling of grey hairbells; a study of great burdock-leaves by a trickling brooklet; a low lichened wall, lit with the vivid crimson of the cranesbill leaves, and making a background to a growth of

“ Tall grasses and white-flowering nettles,”

some yellow flags and turquoise forget-me-nots by a pond; such modest and unambitious bits as these, if honest renderings, please me far more than all the Claudian unrealities—forest, castle, mountain, with twelfth-cake men, swans, &c., stuck in front—that tell of fancy painting or mere reminiscence and *studio* work. Of course, a great Painting (like Millais' Ophelia), also transcribed from Nature, is far above such faithful studies; but the merest sketch from Nature, if it were but a couple of buff rose-eaved mushrooms in the short grass, is preferable, to my mind, to the most aspiring and finished studio labour. If young-lady amateurs would but find out the truth of this, and leave all their pretty fancy lakes and skies and mountains, and just go into the lane, and carefully draw and colour, on the spot, a plume of wrinkled hart's-tongue fern, with a shelf of red sandstone behind it, or a spike of fox-glove against a hoary oak-bole, they would learn, first, how little their drawing-room practice is really teaching them to draw or paint; next, how far more pleasure to themselves and others is derivable from a portfolio of studies from Nature, than from a waggon-load of blue and green Italian washes. At first the attempt would cause almost despair; but perseverance and practice will do wonders. And besides, that

which disgusted while you had Nature's inimitable work before you, and at the time when you had been minutely studying the perfect details of the great Master's art, this same production that you would have been relieved then to have torn in half, will often please you better, and, indeed, agreeably surprise you, when you return to it with dulled remembrance of the original, and free from the blight of that odious comparison. The coming short of a high aim produces work of nobler quality than the succeeding in a lower. And it *is* a high aim to take brush and colours, and try really to represent even a fringe on Nature's garment.

I think this is well shown by the instance of the drawings in any of the many illustrated books of the day. How far preferable that spray of furze, in an initial letter—drawn, you see at once, from Nature—to the whole-page landscapes composed of unreal foregrounds and conventional backgrounds; trees made up in the studio, with never a bit of real *drawing* about branch or foliage. I could warrant that almost any one could pick out the fancy compositions from the real studies, in any one of these collections.

Pre-Raphaelitism (the Ritualism of Art,) did wonders for us, and has, upon the Academy walls, given to Londoners many a treat from the Country. And to attain its care and exactness without the harshness to which it is prone; and to secure the attention to detail without the loss of the harmony in the whole, would bring us near perfection. Towards which, in things great and in things small, let us ever uncompromisingly tend! The painter, as compared with other makers—poets and composers—labours under this disadvantage, that he cannot give sound or motion (though Hogarth has almost attained the former, and Rubens the latter); he can only give one present

moment, with but a hint of past or future. Nevertheless he has the power, in some certain degree, of improving Nature by his art : as thus—by selecting and composing ; by reticence here, and by more forcible expression there :—but Arnold has exceedingly well set forth something of that I intend :

“ Behold, I said, the painter’s sphere !
The limits of his art appear !
The passing group, the summer morn,
The grass, the elms ; that blossomed thorn ;
Those cattle couched, or, as they rise,
Their shining flanks, their liquid eyes ;
• These, or much greater things, but caught
Like these, and in one aspect brought.
In outward semblance he must give
A moment’s life of things that live :
Then let him choose his moment well,
With power divine its story tell !”

Well, our talk has waxed rather profound over our first sketcher ; we will touch the others with a lighter hand. As for my own attempt, I am one, I must confess, who cannot *sketch* merely. Painful and careful finish, or nothing, for me. And certainly I am so far in the right track that care at first leads to ease at last. You remember Michael Angelo’s speech (I think it was his) when his patron demurred to the great price of a piece which had taken but a short time to accomplish. “Sixty years’ careful labour,” he exclaimed, “has it taken me before I could produce such a work in such time ;” and then he dashed the sculpture in anger to the ground. And that which seems so easily done, as you watch one who has got the trick of brush and colour, and the knowledge of the right thing to do at once ; this is, be sure, the result only of long practice, pains and care. But Amateurs mostly would begin where Masters are leaving off.

Never mind now, however, *my* toil which will *not* result in a masterful ease; but pass on to the other groups or units. Here is one of those blue bits of foreground; as such we were unrespectfully considering her just now: let us draw near, and we find Nature's sweetest work—a bright fair girl in her teens. Her sketch, methinks, was well begun; but out upon those lazy officers (our Club was considerably too near a camp) who came here merely to idle and to make love! See, they are sprawling—some eighteen feet of them—on the soft turf about her; they vote the sketching “slow” (why couldn't they keep away then? I like people to be in earnest, even in their amusements); and Mistress Muriel is not being helped on, to say the least of it, by their attentions. And I like the child too well to endure the idea of her marrying into the army: for I have lived beside a camp and seen the life. However, I suppose I can't help it, if it is to be.* Only, were I President of the Club, I would introduce a rule to keep out those who don't mean *work* in their play. I am one of those who hold that mere trifling is always objectionable, and that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well—from playing croquet to governing a kingdom. So I look askance, and with jaundiced eye, at the baskings of these moths in that bright and attractive flame.

And I go on to a painter in oils. When I used to exhibit in the Royal Academy (I say this, I own, with a little pardonable pomposity) oils were my element. I had never even ventured on the water. But I soon found, when Art had sunk into the place of a recreation, that oil was far too exigent of time; and I have nearly quite laid by the rows of soft tubes, the elastic

* It *was* to be.

hoghairs, the seductive mc.guelp., and those clear, firm, creamy canvases that, after a few knocks at the corners, so invite a beginning upon them. And I have taken up water-colours; neat dark tin boxes, with cells of moist pigments, and well-filled block. Oils have their advantages; but, for sketching, I think water must bear the palm. How often will this member, over whose canvas we are now standing, have to come back to the castle, if he is really to make anything of his painting! The getting it dry, and scraping it, then another process of painting, and so on, to the glaze; ten to one, however, he will finish, and spoil, his work at home. But even if he returns, he cannot have just the atmosphere and the circumstances of this day; the mist of green will have become foliage; there will be a different sky. The water-colorist can put down at once what is here at this moment, and there an end. Hence that freshness and reality which we may notice in even the inferior paintings of a water-colour exhibition, above oil pieces of more pretension. In water colour I love the delicacy and cleanness; tints, as I said, just laid on and left. In oils, the richness and the body. But I like each to keep to its own department. I like neither the thin glazy style in oil, which loses its own advantages without gaining the delicacy of water; nor the profuse use of body colours in water painting, which sacrifices the clear delicacy of this branch of the art for a dull opaque caricature of oil.*

But let me remember that I am not writing now for art students; though, since most people visit the Exhibitions, *some* Art-talk will have an interest even to general readers. Moreover, that I promised to indicate some other subjects which were to make up

* There are exceptions to this. But will they last?

the studies that should be exhibited at the year's end, to admiring or *silent* acquaintance. So we suppose the sun sinking lower and lower into the sea beyond the castle walls ; and the shade and light completely altered ; and all but the *very* eager art-followers wearied out ; and, after the settling in solemn conclave our next gathering point, the wheels passing off the noiseless turf into the noisy road ; the pedestrians winding through the cool meadows, and through clover and incipient wheat, by shorter cuts home : a pleasant day over, and some work done, and much talking.

It has been a pleasant day to me, at any rate ; although, according to my wont, I have sat a good deal alone. Meditation concerning one's pursuits, and concerning the sharers in them, is, to me, the greatest part of the enjoyment. I like, at intervals, to be a little apart, in any pleasant gathering ; not aloof, but apart ; and to muse and philosophize, and watch, and speculate. Then the siesta in the open air is always a pleasure, whether in

“ The sweet spring days,
With whitening hedges, and uncrumpling fern,
And blue-bells trembling by the forest ways,
And scent of hay new mown,”

or in the long and lazy summer hours,

“ While to my ear, from uplands far away,
The bleating of the folded flocks is borne,
With distant cries of reapers in the corn—
All the live murmur of a summer day.”

Or in August, when a hint of change is just making the Summer thoughtful, to sit, sometimes to recline,

“ Screened in this nook o'er the high, half-reaped field.”

and in intervals of painting the distance to enjoy the beauty close at hand : to note,

“ Through the thick corn the scarlet-poppies peep,
And round green roots and yellowing stalks to see
Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep ;
And air-swept lindens yield
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed showers
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
And bower me from the August sun with shade.”

Or even later : when the days are short for sketching, and the foliage thinning, and the sky a colder blue above the flushing landscape, to try to place the waning scene upon the paper that refuses no season : and to sketch, now,

“ The gleam-lighted lake ;”

or to touch in

“ The hill side,
Thin-sprinkled with farms,
Where the high woods strip sadly
Their yellowing arms.”

There ! all these bits I got from a single portfolio—a portfolio which, if better known, would be oftener sought.

But I have yet to go back to our Club, and note down certain of our expeditions, besides that which detained us so long at the castle. Next time then, we assembled about a quaint country Church. There were here, too, pleasant greys enough, and upon the shingle roof much cadmium lichen, and cool silver half-crowns of this same growth all over the ancient walls. There was, moreover, (rather a poser to our sketchers at first,) a white wooden box like a pigeon-house where the steeple should have risen. But this looked rather picturesque on paper or canvas, how-

ever unpromising had seemed its appearance in prosaic reality. The great point of attraction for our party, however, had been three huge-stemmed mighty Yew-trees, which stood, and had for hundreds of years stood, in that Churchyard: giving a grand semi-transparent shade to the ground, and a picturesque gloom to the grey Building. A beautiful little vignette this made, touched in against the young green of a hop-garden, which adjoined the Sleeping-place of the Dead. The new white Crosses, and the ancient grey, and the sombre Yews, with their sienna trunks, and the girlish green (so to speak) of the young and sportive hops: here, you will perceive, were materials enough for many a choice sketch. Would they had had more justice done them, we all felt.

Again we met above a blue sea bay; France smouldering in the distance, like a faint white cloud; a bold gorse-hill in full bloom in the foreground; snowy sails distinct against, yet as it were melting into, the soft hazy sea; white-winged sea-gulls dipping here and there, and setting knives to work to scratch them upon the ultramarine; dull smoke of steamers on the horizon.

Again, it was a white gabled-cottage, on one side standing over its ankles in a brook; set in masses of trees, heavy and dark, and silent, with that depth of summer foliage which just goes before the change; into which, indeed, the warning streak has stolen here and there. I need not say that at this period the robins began to take a kindly interest in our work, and I felt that, even if I could have caught that breathless hush of the landscape, the scene must be robbed of one of its chief charms by the absence of that sweet, cheery, interpreting song.

And then we boldly ventured upon a grand autumn

clump of trees. Some of our band took fright altogether, and would not try them ; some attempted the whole scene, some, a single monarch. In one case alone could we unite to award enthusiastic praise, and, collecting about the board of one successful, yet despairing workman, to exclaim unanimously, after all our own failures :—

“ ’Tis done ; and see,
Backed by the sunset, which doth glorify
The orange and pale violet evening sky,
Bare on its lonely ridge, the tree ! the tree ! ”

There is something very pleasant about such a Club as this whose annals I have unworthily set down. There is a pleasure in lonely ramblings ; but, after all, man is a gregarious animal, and there is greater pleasure in meeting together for an amusement which is also an employment ; not a harmful pursuit nor a mere profitless dawdle. There is a freedom in it all, a liberty, the delightful out-of-door feeling ; and the sunny side of character comes into prominence ; the stiff unbend, and the silent talk, and the shy feel at their ease ; and the old grow younger. There are drawbacks, no doubt ; besides the traditional bull, there is the terrific possibility of—just as you stood back to look at your oil sketch—seeing it tip forward in a light rising air, and—but let us draw a veil over the scene. Of course it falls on its face ; and oh, the bits of grass and grit ! Or you have backed on to a sedate cow that lay ruminating on the grass, and delighted your friends by shooting backwards over the amazed animal. Or some dozen of girls and boys, mothers and babies, collect round and crowd you up, and much disconcert you, who are of rather a diffident turn. They don’t understand the processes ; and they express their opinion in loud whispers ;—also they have had onions for dinner.

However, when all is said and done, we have enjoyed our day. The communion of released mind with mind, and the meeting of lighter thought with thought, in a pleasant foil-play, this was of itself healthy. And the communion with Nature: with that which is always calm amid our ceaseless perturbations; always great among our pettinesses; always fresh among our wearinesses; always new while we grow so old: is not this charming, also elevating to the mind and heart?

"O dreary life!" we cry, "O dreary life!"
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds
Serenely live while we are keeping strife
With Heaven's true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle! Ocean girds
Unslackened the dry land—savannah-swards
Unweary sweep—hills watch, unworn—and rife
Meek leaves drop yearly from the forest trees,
To show above the unwasted Stars that pass
In their old glory. O Thou God of old,
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to these!
But so much patience, as a blade of grass
Grows by contented through the heat and cold!"





No. V.

FALLING LEAVES.—A STRING OF AUTUMN FANCIES.

IT is November now ; and the poppies are mostly gone, and the corn was reaped long ago. The Year is resting, quietly resting, almost alike from toiling and from enjoying. The vigour of its work and the glee of its play are alike over. They are merged and subdued in a tranquillity which is not enjoyment, far less pain, but which is just a passive state, the state which, after exciting labour and exciting pleasure, simply petitions now, for a season, to be left without any necessity for exertion ; receiving impressions, if they must yet be received, just passively, with no reaching out of the hand after them. It is, for the exhausted Year—though not for ever-vigorous Nature—the still languor of a worn-out life. With a feeling easily fancied as akin to that of extreme old age among the race of men, the Year has withdrawn from the whirl of life and death, and ceases from even the appearance of being much or strongly moved by either. The corn that swayed in the cool airs of evening, that whispered with a grateful undertone as the tender showers rustled down, that ripened all the long, hot summer days ; the corn, that was once and for a while a thing of deep interest, anxiety, and gratification—a thing instinct with life and movement—is all put by now, whether full or thin in ear ; stacked up dry and useful, and silent

and colourless, in the peaked erections that nestle about the different homesteads. The corn-flowers, ah ! these are less easy to find ; the wind took them, and they are gone ; or they decayed in the rainy days ; or they simply bloomed themselves out, and fell and withered where they grew, while the time was still Summer and the days still long and warm. They were not much missed then,—for many buds were opening all about them ; they are not regarded now, nor does their loss sadden, although

“ The south wind searches for the flowers whose fragrance late
he bore,
And sighs to find them by the wood and in the fields no
more.”

Yet not so. The Year is past that. The winds are still and acquiescent, now October's panic has gone by. In the misty, still November the search for flowers has ceased, nor can the worn and aged Year spare a sigh because the young and the beautiful are passing or past.

No, for *Nature* it is but “ *reculer pour sauter*,”—but *this* Year, this 1868, has no part or lot in the matter. It is past taking any interest in either new-born hopes or old despairs. See ! the corn is gone, the flowers are fallen, the fields are bare ; the thick-heaped leaves mantle the dark mould of the forests, and clothe the rugged roots of the ancient naked trees. The grass has ceased to grow ; the fogs brood over the land ; there is a glistening of dull tears along the branches ; and, monotonously and irregularly, their ceaseless drip upon the yellow and brown carpet that was lately the green and living glory of Oak and Beech and Elm.—Well, and what of all this ? What matter these things to the over-old and utterly-wearied Year ? What concern has it now in the death and desolation which

has come over all that which in its youth and in its prime made it so excited, and eager, and hopeful, and proud, and glad? It could have mourned once, it *did* mourn once, to watch the change stealing over all; to note first the pause in the advance of life;—then the gravity which was the prescience of approaching death; then the hectic flush here and there; and the first leaves stealing down; and anon the blackened victims of the first frost. The Year was sad in September; in October a cry of anguish shrilled from its bowers, breaking the stillness. But all that is past. It is November now. The broken year is too old to care much for losses. For itself, December is even now at the door.

Nor does the passive stagnant-hearted Year care for gains; for new-born hopes, for promises and anticipations and lookings forward to achievements and enjoyments in which it can have no share. See, the patient earth is being, for the many hundredth time, turned over by the plough, and prepared for the swelling grain; men are making ready for the new Year while the old has yet two months of life; the corn is cast into the furrows, and the poppies have shed their seed; ay, further than this, the young green has ruled the brown pages of the fields for the Child-year's earliest essays; and myriad seedlings are developing their first young leaflets out of their expanded cotyledons. Every tree in the copse and every twig in the hedge has its bud for next year even where this year's leaves have but just loosed their hold: Nature does not wait to be "off with the old love," before it is "on with the new."

But what then? How does all this latent excitement, ready to burst, at the first signal, into flame; how does all this ambush of hope and impetuosity and energy of life, at all affect the over-ancient Year?

It is not jealous. It is not saddened. It is not impatient. It is not in the least glad or interested. All these coming changes have nothing to do with it. All this budding life can concern it no whit. It has done, many days ago, with all these things. If regrets cannot move it, still less can anticipations. It is passionless with extreme age. It has loosed hands with life. It is waiting, but with no impatience or emotion, for the moment of which the Poet sings,

“When midnight-bells cease ringing suddenly,
And the Old Year is dead.”

So some ancient, very ancient grandsire or dame sits day after day in the chimney-corner; with glazed eyes that see nothing, with dulled ears that hear nothing, with numbed heart that heeds nothing, of all the noise which the young things make about the house, of all the schemes and plans of the youths and maidens, of all the works and anxieties of the men and women. There is a Funeral; but the loss affects not them: there is a Birth; they feel no joy: there is a Wedding; but their many years have muffled all the glad ringing of the bells. Yes, like the Grandmother in Tennyson's Poem, they have outlived joy or grief; they cannot feel, nor are able even to grieve that they cannot grieve, that the springs of sadness or of gladness are alike dried up.

“Why do you look at me, Annie? you think I am hard and cold;

But all my children have gone before me, I am so old;

I cannot weep for Willy, nor can I weep for the rest;

Only at your age, Annie, I could have wept with the best.”

But to what end is all this later than autumnal thought? What is the sum of it? Why I suppose little else than this: that November has come, and

that, going out to seek, I cannot find even one stray lingerer of all my scarlet poppies ; and the woods were dripping, and the mist wrapping the day ; and no sane person would think of projecting an out-door pleasuring ; and the fire-lit Christmas season had not yet come ; and so I just let my pen follow the train of thought which the mind took from the influence of the season. I set to work to saunter among the woodlands, and in default of other material, to link some fancies, analogies, whimsies, with Nature's quiet contemplation of her empty fields and hedgerows, and of her wide store of fallen leaves.

Fallen leaves, and November : yes, thus they must be spoken of, when the month is nearing its end. But I shall have my shot at them flying, and, for my idyll of the Autumn, or rather of the post-Autumn, recall the days when they were not fallen, only falling. There is much to be said about these frail, fair parables of human life ; and more fancies to be woven from them than I shall have space to set forth, or than you would have patience to read. Fallen leaves, fallen leaves : have not the Poets of all ages caught each his golden handful, as they rustled earthward, and straightway busied themselves a-moralizing over them. Does not the melancholy Sarpedon enlarge upon them to the crafty Diomed, and, absorbed in the thought of their silent irony, change golden arms for brazen, as though not worth a careful thought ? And in our earliest efforts of poetry, utterances full of a strange and tender presentiment which has often made me wonder,—did not the leaves play their part very fully ? Were they not ever stealing down, and leaving us bare to wintry winds, ay, and this when really we were sticky with innumerable buds, from which the new green was only just beginning to un-crumple ? And now, as a little past your prime, you

walk meditatively up that woodland path, stirring with your footsteps the strewing of flat sienna patines rough with the beech-mast, and the fuller yellow fans, amid which the clean horse-chestnuts lie, and the deep-cut oak leafage, all scattered with smooth acorns and empty cups, and the little leaves of the golden serrated elm carpet, with no fruit at all ;—as you make a rustling with your tread among the fallen glories of the Summer, is not even now the fount of your heart's poetry somewhat unlocked ? Is there not something tender, something mournful, yet something also quietly dear, about the strewing of the dead leaves which muffle your path ; and about the flights which hurry, or the stragglers which yet steal down to join their sweet sisterhood of the past gay summer hours ? Does not the very scent, heavy, and moist, and drug-like, bring a something—— Well, you either know the feeling, the associations and suggestions of the fallen and falling leaves, or you do not. In either case I have said enough.

Let me recall how I saw them,—fallen,—falling,—a year ago, methinks, on a tender, warm, pale-blue day, just before November came. Ah, I remember, I was going,—as, in our turn, most of us go, the grave and the laughers too,—I was going, as you have gone, or will go, to sit beside a fading form ; to glean the last words, the last looks, the last sweet smiles of a dear friend. The experience, I say, is not an uncommon one. I mention it merely by the way. The point for my present purpose is this : the falling of the leaves upon this day that was so still and peaceful. That was just how leaves should fall, methought : the beauty and the sadness were so matched : as though they were music and words ; and which was which I really could not say.

I paused on a bridge that ran over a trout stream

into which I had been intently gazing, if perchance. I might spy a speckled trout poising himself above his shadow on the gold-netted sandy bottom. Often had I thus paused, thus pored, thus seen, in boyhood, letting my hoop lie idle. But now I sought in vain, and my mental basket remained unfilled. So I turned to go on. And my way led through a quiet, tree-bordered wide lane. Just then a moist gleam was drawn over the path, and caught the wet ivy on the elms that were stript of branches till near the top. It caught also the wet glistening leaves that lay, here thickly and there sparsely, on the road. I watched them well-pleased, lying so quiet and content in the light of that tearful smile; lying so patient and still; but just then a scattering of them ran towards me in an air, bright in the sun upon the sodden road, instinct for the moment with life again. Soon they subsided; and I stood for some quarter of an hour, watching the pale yellow stragglers, just voluntarily (it seemed) detaching themselves from the branches, and sailing down, lit by that gleam, distinct against the dark ivy-clothing of the tall and silent trees. There was no wind to hurry them: it was just loosing their hold one after one, and exchanging death on the tree for rest on the brown mould, or on the bright green turf which edged the road. A pensive mist; a watery gleam; and the leaves stealing so leisurely down: I shall always remember the day and the scene, I think, however little I may have been able to make the reader understand wherefore. But there are moods of every heart which make it apt to take the impress of a slightly-cut die.

A drenched and tear-dabbled poppy, do you call this? Well, well, is there not a place and a time in the year and in the copse, and in lonely musings and

in crowded rooms, and in country places, and in London Society, for the Autumn and for falling leaves, and for dreamy hours, and for quiet thoughts, and for pauses in the laughter? And people like to read of Autumn, if the pen have cunning to set it before them, and to make for city readers the leaves of a magazine rustle like those of the strewn avenue; and to call up a simple plaintive robin's song in the intervals of the heated concert; and to bring a cool mist and a low-voiced wind to the couples resting in the ante-room while the gay dance goes on for awhile without them. There is a "joy of grief" which is pleasant, so Ossian tells us; and we all know that (especially for the young) there is a sweetness and a weird charm about melancholy; a nameless attraction in the pathos of a voice, a story, a poem, an air.

"Our sweetest songs are those.
That tell of saddest thought."

Not downright, real sadness of our own, there is plenty of this in life, but the far-away dirge music of "In Memoriam"—the pathos of "Guinevere"—the false sentiment even of a "Childe Harold;"—ay, and the bitterness of a "Vanity Fair." We don't want, for our enjoyment, at least, the dismal details of newspaper reports; but we sometimes like to lean back in our chair, and listen to the coming and going of bells, or to the wild cadences of an Æolian harp fixed in a window. Not any sustained air, not any distinct purpose; a vagrant melody, a vagabond sweetness; suggestive, rather than expletive; fraught more with the meaning that the heart just then likes to give it, than with any special message of its own.

Have I set myself right with my readers? Have I sufficiently justified my theme, and my wayward manner of treating it? Then will I return to my

falling leaves, and my November landscape, and (always careful not to smuggle too much of the contraband article of earnestness into the light talk of Society) pipe a few robin stanzas; bring up a few swellings and sinkings of bell music; summon a few wailings from the harp of the wind (well-bred, well-behaved wailings, mind you: "I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove," so that the soothed reader shall murmur, "Let him roar again")—and all upon the leaf-suggested theme of Decay.

"'Tis an old tale, and often told," but we sit at the feet of the years, like children never tired, and keep asking for the old stories again, and again, and again. And the complaisant years repeat them, and go over the old experiences, and thrill the wrapt listeners with the old interests, and startle them with the old developments, and stir them with the old wonders. They go through the well-worn programme: beginning with the snowdrops and crocuses; the primroses and violets—stories for the Child. Next, the birds coming back; the swallows and the blackcaps; the thrush and the nightingale, and all the singing, and all the nest-building—stories for the Youth and the Maid. Next, the brave oaks putting on their foliage, and the lilacs and laburnums gay in their perfection, and the larch copses thickened, and the woodlands clothed, and the apple-orchards a sheet of rose and snow; all the richness of early prime, and all the earnestness and flush of life's schemes just started—stories for the Man and the Woman when now the billing-time and the budding-time has passed. Next, the fulness of the green, and a staid gravity grown over the colour, and a calm earnestness over the excitement; life's steady business settled down to, and fully entered upon—stories for the man and the woman in their prime. And then,—and then,—the graveness deep-

ing into something more than grave, the flush that is not of life or health touching this tree and flushing that copse; the apples picked, the plums fallen, the corn carried, the flowers passing away, the first leaves fluttering down; the sob of rain, the sigh of winds, the mist of frosts, the flight of birds; the stealthy and then the swift advent, the partial and then the universal reign, of decay—stories even for all!

But how is it that the interest is so kept up—has never flagged—for these so many hundreds of years? How comes it that the tellers do not weary of repeating, the hearers never weary of hearing, so ancient a story—such an oft-told tale? A tale whose incidents are so hackneyed, its end so easily guessed, nay, forestalled?

Look at the Tellers, and look at the hearers, and your question is answered. *They are never the same.* Each new year that comes turns over the old old pages, eagerly, excitedly, as though they were scarce dry from the press. Each hearer that listens so earnestly has never heard the stories—not heard them, at least, told to him or herself before. See, you have looked away from those absorbed children but a little while, and they have passed on to listen to the Youth's story now; and that youth and maiden have, for their part, fixed their rapt soul upon the tale that that further group have just done with. So each in turn finds each and all of earth's old old stories new. One thing must be noticed, which is peculiar. Sometimes the story, for a little child or for a youngling, skips the regular gradations and goes on at once from the snowdrops or the birds'-nests to the falling leaves and the broken flowers, and the carried corn. So, I said, that last story is one told even for all. And another strange thing (at which I have already hinted) is this. That sometimes the listeners in the early

stages turn perversely from the story of the birds and the flowers (still, however, keeping a finger in the place), and ask for that sad autumnal tale, and that there may pass, before their spring hearts, the flushed pageant, the faint panorama, of decay. So they call it up before them, and love to dwell on it ;—and the reason is that in the exuberance of their life they cannot realize Death ; and that in the vigour of their growth, decay is to them an unreal thing, like a dream,—which though it saddens you, you are irresistibly urged to keep recalling. They see all, through the enchantment of distance. They like to look off their flowers and glad leaves sometimes, for a little while ; because they can, at pleasure, turn their young eyes upon life, and growth, and bloom, and nest-building, and hope, and joy, and ecstasy again.

Falling leaves, and decay. This old theme, then, finds new listeners still ; and not only among those who have read up to that point in the volume, but among those who, having but begun it, find a fascinating interest in taking just a few peeps towards the pathetic end. And they think it a pretty story, before the time comes at which it is being told to themselves.

But how soon that time comes, to some ! At least, in the instance of our feelings, once so fresh and eager. What falling leaves these are ! Our enjoyments, our sorrows, our wonders ; how transient is their life ! As we look back through the lanes and avenues of the former years, how they are indeed carpeted with joys that were green and gay once, but that tarnished, and grew sere, and fluttered down. There very many lie upon the path that we have trodden : lifeless, but remembered ; not gone quite from our backward gaze. But very many more have quite decayed, and their remembrance is as completely gone as the track

of an arrow that passed through the air, or as the remembrance of a guest that tarried but a day. How delicate they were, when they were first born! how they trembled in the air, and shimmered in the sun, and grew strong, and "clapped their hands in glee;" and anon decayed gradually, or were torn off the branch by some rough wind, and were forgotten, or only remain as dead, dry things now, and quite other than that they were when new to life,—soft, downy, green! Oh, old loves, and hopes, and fresh delights, and delicious agonies of the days of youth, how you are strewn in the back years of most lives; forgotten, or, if remembered, robbed of your delicate beauty, withered, crisp, brown! Many a husband, who was once, but is not now, a lover—let him look back, and watch until those old leaves run towards him in a gleam of sunshine, saying, "See, we once were living delights—but now——" And perhaps the gleam dies, and the air falls, and they settle down into silence again.

But we must not forget that the darker trees also shed their leaves. There are falling leaves of yew and of cypress, and of rosemary and rue. Many of the leaves that strew our past were of such a sombre character, and sorrows and regrets, as well as joys and anticipations, fall thick in the blast, or sink in the calm, as our year goes on towards November. Some wholesome regrets, some sorrows that were better than the joys or the indifference that have taken their place, will often be of the number of these. But, in truth, the sharpest bereavements, the keenest regrets, the most poignant anguishes—it is wonderful, and even saddening, to note how these flutter down into forgetfulness and oblivion, or change into dead things that do but lie as part of the mosaic pavement of the past.

"O last regret, regret can die!"

The poet explains and justifies this, or rather denies the real and inward truth of this, in his own case. But who, of life's even momentary thinkers,—who, that for a few minutes stands by the wall to watch, while the light dance goes on—who but, thus watching and thus thinking, must wonder that externally at least, and really in some measure, this sorrowful world can be so light-hearted?

What, you have lost a chiefest near and dear one: one whose life was part of yours,—without whose smile, whose word, whose society, you must (you *know*) dwindle and die? *Is* it so? Yes, honestly you think it to be so, as you watch by the ebbing life, as you bend over the silence of death, as you follow to the old Kirk-yard, as you come day after day with your flower-cross to the beloved grave.

But the years—perhaps only the months—go by; and lo, you are nearly as gay and glad as in old days, when the wife, the husband, the sister, the brother, the dear child was with you. There is no floral cross on the mound: the turf is worn and broken: there are tall nettles about and over the sacred spot. There is a new Wife or Husband in the old home, new children in the Nursery;—new leaves that have quite pushed away that blight and death which had come over the branches.

It is (in some degree) well so, and the result of a merciful ordering. For life must go on, and we on the march must not spend the brief remainder of our day bowed down to the earth beside the comrade who has dropped out of the ranks. But we forget *too soon*; we go back into life too little really moved by our nearest bereavements to satisfy the mind that knows itself to have a portion in the Infinite and the Eternal. Still a distinction must be made. Some there are who do indeed forget, who live the new life as though the

old had never been. Some there are again whose memories are at times kept at arm's length by crowding of business and occupation. But these have their autumn days of quiet thought : they pause again and again upon some bridge of life ; and a sudden pale gleam lights up the misty and ivy-robed past ; and in a little air, the dead leaves get up again as though alive, and run towards them, golden in the sun.

The bitterness of Vanity Fair. I spoke of this just now ; and noticed how even those who live the life which it denounces yet, in some moods, delight in the pen which scathes them. And in truth there is a use in a class of writing which digs up the world's green lawn, and shows how underneath all the smooth well-kept covering, the inevitable worms yet writhe. There is use in the moralizing which points to the disease, even though it sadly and disappointingly stops short of declaring the remedy. And so I miss the caustic pen of that unsparing yet kindly satirist of the hollow Nineteenth century ; and can ill spare his sharp ploughing of the weedy fields, in which afterwards, perhaps, good corn might be sown. "*Falling Leaves*," this might figuratively be called his text : and he caught up the revelation of emptiness, so to speak, and rang all the changes on his bells ; and never passed on to the revelation of fulness for which that sad refrain had been preparing. "*Vanitas vanitatum* : vanity of vanities, all is vanity," so he tolled, so he reiterated in his laughter and in his tears. The young and the beautiful and the gay and the valiant and the wise :—it was the green life of a moment, and then decay, and leaves sailing down, and bare boughs, and a blank sky.

Thus Thackeray painted Society.

And who can wonder at his bitterness, at his irony,

at the tears in his laughter, and the laughter in his tears ;—who can wonder at these, if once they do, as I said, get them out of the jostling and the gaiety and the noise of laughter (which are the bubbles upon the surface of the stream of Society), and stand by the wall (wall-flowers in the World's great ball-room), to watch the dance of life—and death? Black garments are not wanted, you will tell me, among your masquerade ; and a clergyman in a ball-room is an intolerable blot. Yet just in this autumn reverie, I shall take leave to enter the throng, and to take my stand, a watcher of the dancing. Or (for I should not feel much at home there), I shall take a long look through some window or loophole, which reveals to me something of the world's giddy and artificial life ; I shall peep through the clefts of light literature, or through the openings made by the ordnance of the Saturnine Reviews.

And when I have done so for a while, I might almost think that I am in my woodland landscape, watching that drama of the falling leaves again. How light and gay the dance and glitter ; but (if you stop to watch) how the leaves are yellowing to the fall, and stealing down one by one ! Faith, and truth, and love, and honesty, and generous trust, and all the chief beauties and glories of youth : how they litter the ground, while the dancers pass over them, unregarding and untroubled ! What a sad thing, to a loving, earnest-hearted thinker, the lightness of society appears ! I mean not the occasional lightness, the innocent and beautiful gaiety and gladness of things, that, being young, and healthy, and new, must have their hours of basking in the sunshine, and dancing in the breeze. No, I mean the unreality, the sham, the emptiness of the employments, of the pleasures, of the vexations, that make up the life of Society,

conventionally so called. That state of things in which all that is earnest is ridiculous, all that is real is in bad taste, all that is sensible is tiresome, all that is grave is shocking, all that is sincere is out of place. That state of things in which every good and pure and human feeling is a matter of laughter or of commerce; love, the subject of a bet; marriage, the means merely of setting oneself right on the turf; honour, the maundering of a fool; faith, a thing exploded, really too far behind the age to be seriously entertained; beauty, the justification of flippancy, impudence, and heartlessness; languor, the truest manliness; a spoilt child's behaviour, the model for maidenly conduct: flippancy, idleness, unreality, vanity, the order of the day.

Hush!—I am getting, I feel, too much in earnest for Society, even on a November day. All earnestness is in bad taste; let me remember this axiom of the period, and draw in my horns. Yet I had not much more to say; and old-fashioned speaking may for a moment be tolerated, even if it be but to be jested upon at the next.

So I look at the Queens of Society, with their unreal life, and their brief reign, and their quick fading and falling; ay, and trace them from the first vermeil-streaked opening of the bud to the Falling leaf and the fading flower. Also at the young men of society; affecting the Autumn before the Spring should have well developed. I do not mean the tender sadness of quiet decay, which comes not unbeautifully at the year's end; but the blight, and the scorching, and the stagnation, and the drought, which a rainless year might bring long before the time of legitimate and calm decay was here. I look at these, I say, in their freshness, in their *greenness*, if you will; in the beauty of their budding manhood: at those in their heyday.

of a season or two, before the bright eye has grown heavy, and the blush has changed into a stare, and the bird-voice into a drawl, and the light step into a well-bred saunter. I look at them before that time when the capacity of enjoyment is gone, or when at least it is thought fine to pretend not to be capable of enjoying ; I look at them when they are fresh from their Father's House, and the portion of goods with which they start on life still quite or nearly untouched. I look at them so merry and blithe and glad, just ere they are detached from the seclusion of the branch on which they were growing, just ere they are entering upon a life which they picture to themselves as not much else but a round of light pleasures ; a perpetual dancing in warm summer airs, and being wooed by light summer breezes, and smiled upon by continual sunshine.

And what do I seem to see ? I see what I have often seen in my woodland walks, at the time of the fall of the leaf. I see the branch eagerly left, I see the vain and giddy thing poised in the air, wafted by some deceitful wind ; glistening, sparkling in the blue, between the ranks of the thoughtful trees. Higher, and higher, and higher ; and more and more blithe and gay ; but soon there is a change. Down, gradually down ; not knowing it yet ; still twinkling and fluttering and eager and bright, thoughtless and light-hearted ; but the irresistible law of gravitation is at work. The butterfly of an hour, sustained for awhile in the blue ; but sinking down, sinking down, sinking down !

Well, everybody is agreed, nowadays, that sermons (except from the lips of pretty preachers, one print allows) are intolerable. Else I would fain complete my Autumn reverie, by pointing to the one Year and the one Sphere in which change and decay are things unknown.

I go on to lighter thought; although this leaf begins indeed to yellow towards the fall.

There is a sadness, though sometimes not an unredeemed nor unmitigated sadness, about the passing away of almost anything. If a guest has been staying with you for some time, even if you cared not greatly for him, yet you miss him, you feel uncomfortable, when the time of his stay has passed, and he is gone. Still more perhaps when he is going; when the leaf is falling: when he is packing up this and that article or book which has become familiar about the house, and when the luggage lies labelled in the hall, and the carriage is standing at the door. Everything that has tarried with us for any length of time soon becomes in a degree part of ourselves, and we seem like a tree that has lost an arm for some while after a severance is made. So the landscape does not strike us with that dreary effect when Winter has been some time with us, which affected us so when the leaves were falling in the Autumn. And thus it is with many changes and losses in life.

Take the instance of Beauty. How the possession of this at once enthrones the possessor upon the hearts of all! What a magic it hath, although here it be really never a perfect thing! and old eyes delight stealthily to bask in it, and young eyes timidly seek it, and it has but to command to be obeyed; yea, myriads are ready at its least hint or beckoning to run to the world's end on its behests. What a power! what a possession! It is absurd to call such a mighty thing a thing of no value, unreal, empty. It has been of reality enough to turn the world's head at divers times in history; it is a silent oratory, which easily persuades to virtue, to crime; which can confer ecstasy, and inflict despair.

And what I am thinking of just now is, that, in

sad truth, this thing of might is but a falling leaf after all! A Summer or two, and it has changed. Another Summer or two, and it has gone. And this seems to me sadder than the death of flowers or leaves. To have been Beatrix in "Esmond," and to be that old hag in the "Virginians!" Alas! the change. I know that such a violent change is not necessary; that there is a comeliness of Maturity and a beauty of Age into which the face and form may pass. But you must own that this is not at all the same thing, in kind, as the beauty of youth; the magic has gone; that flush of the Spring's blossom was quite distinct from the Summer's gravity and the Autumn calm. And surely there is a sadness in this instance about the first stealing down of the leaves, a sadness (it should seem) more for the beholders than for the subject of their contemplation. When Helen of Troy has grown wrinkled and bent, then surely "there hath passed a glory from the earth;" and must we not mourn that this is so?

It does not seem enough to answer, That moral beauty is the only beauty worth a thought or a regret, and that this is abiding, while all other is evanescent. "Handsome is that handsome does:" this saying is true in its degree, but yet if we look below the surface, we find it built upon a fallacy. Because a man is great and good, or a woman sweet and gentle, of course I love and admire. But is this at all the same kind of admiration as that which the rosy cheek, the coral lip, the sparkling eye, the dark or golden hair, can command? Pshaw! the two things are distinct. If you *must* have one without the other, of course you would not be long in your choice. But nevertheless you could not have *both* by choosing *one*. And I look ever forward to a state of things when beauty both moral and physical will go hand in hand. And

meanwhile I hold to it that there is and there must be a sadness, however it be not an unalleviated, an unredeemed sadness, in the stealing down of the first leaves of whatever was lovely in this world where all real beauty is a relic of Eden's bowers.

There are many falling leaves that we might linger yet to watch ; for example, lives, dear lives, that pass with the leaves as the years steal by—and further, intellect ; power ; imagination ; memory ; fear. “ *We all do fade as a leaf.*” There is good authority, you see, for my statement, that there is a kindred, a bond of union, between us. Enough now, however, of my sere autumnal weavings. November will pass, and hale December is close at hand. The Falling leaves are hidden under the snow. Make way for the Evergreens !





NO. VI.

CHRISTMAS PARTIES.

MAKE way for the evergreens!" These words ended my somewhat pensive November musings. The falling leaves have fallen now, and, more than this, they are pretty well put away out of sight. Throngs in the storm and solitary in the calm, they streamed or straggled from the tossed or patient branches: but now the flitting is over (save for a few dry and determined beech and oak tenants which stubbornly disregard the notice to quit); and the gay dresses of the year are put away. It lies, indeed, in its white snow-shroud, and does not want them any more. The fallen leaves are gone.

The worms did what they could towards this tidying up the room, after the winds had done with their playthings: many and many a one they stowed out of sight, all but an end or so which would stick out of the clay. Barrow-loads of them were wheeled off by the gardener, and the shrubberies are all raked and tidied, so that you may get the first delightful vision of the snowdrop, and crocus, and daffodil points; and the smooth, ungrowing lawn is never littered now with flakes pale and large from the sycamore, red and flat from the beech, orange and black-pitted from the apple, gold and silver from the poplar, bronze from the pear, purple from the medlar, scarlet from the cherry. These are all cleared away,

they no longer now either lie sullen beside the path, nor run in circles till they drop down giddy on the lawn. Perhaps they were gathered into such a high many-coloured heap as Millais once painted, and the tongued fire shot out here and there from a cleft, and the blue spiral smoke wandered away in thin lines out of many a vent, or, if you stirred the frail heap, rolled up in a grey full volume towards the twilight sky. And so the glad, summer-lived things were not left to perish by damp and long decay, but, more beautifully for them, were returned by cremation to the dust from which they rose, and next morning a white handful of impalpable ash was all that marked the place of the high funeral-pyre. Better than to have been ignominiously shot into some wide hole,—promiscuously cast, as it were, into some plague-pit, after that great autumn epidemic which had laid them low, far too fast for separate burial by the careful worms ; better to be this white powder, than to be that decaying mass.

But perhaps not better than to lie, as the forest leaves are yet lying, in an undisturbed and solemn state, under the great dark plumes of the Pines, and under the taper-light of the Stars ; or,—if you like to call it a burial ground,—in the grand Forest cemetery, every Tree a tall and naked monument, watching, with its great cross-arms, over the many generations of its dead children. Quietly they sleep in the deep calm, no vexing winds can reach to harass them ; where each fell, there it took its settled place ; and, unless for a scared rabbit, or a strutting pheasant, or a stealthy fox, or a nimble squirrel, there it lies, for ever undisturbed. “Rain makes music in the trees” far, very far above them : it is a distant, dreamy sound matching well with the “dim religious light” which pervades all the hushed Forest aisles ; no disturbing gladness of sun-

light or depression of shadow comes to interfere with the passionless calm which has become the atmosphere of their repose. If there be a stained window or two, slanting rich colour through the dark columns, this is only at sunset time, and at the extremest bounds of the great temple ; sound, light, air, are all, as the rule, subdued into an equal harmony, throughout the endless parallel aisles. The fiercest tempests raging far above in the tops of the bare or evergreen Trees do but make a hoarse lullaby for the dead leaves far beneath, that yet need not the soothing cadence of their muffled roar to deepen the intensity of their repose. "Let them rave." Their anger is subdued to a dreamlike melodious sough, but the thrum and murmur of the vibrating forest stirs in the fallen leaves no emotions, no remembrances. Above them the young Spring will be dressing all the bare branches again with the million million shimmerings and palpitations which once are to be living foliage, and shall also be Fallen Leaves.

"No second Spring have they in store,
But where they fall, forgotten to abide,
Is all their portion, and they ask no more."

Life was a beautiful thing in them, and in them even life's decay was beautiful, and there is a serene though melancholy loveliness in their death. And no doubt the analogies which envelope them give the explanation of the intense fascination which most pensive minds find in the contemplation of these Pensioners of the short Summer. Quiet, if subdued thoughts, linger about them for him

"Who with a gentle heart goes forth
Under the hushed and tranquil evening sky,
And looks
On duties well performed, and days well spent.

For him the wind, ay, and the yellow leaves,
Shall have a voice, and give him eloquent teachings.
He shall so hear the solemn hymn, that Death
Has lifted up for all, that he shall go
To his long resting-place without a tear."

But now the leaves are gone, the summer leaves ;—let them lie ! It is the time for the Evergreens. And how delightful to see these heaped in the out-house, ready for the Christmas decorations : great masses of them : boughs ;—half-trees you might almost think. Cartloads of them passing along the streets, along the hard and frosty streets, the streets just rimed enough with a light snow to shew the dark track of wheels, of wheels which cross and interlace, and hoofs which break the striped pattern of the roads. Covent Garden is still piled with these spoils of the shrubberies, but you have secured, either thence or from the country, your own peculiar stock of them ; and Kate and Violet have pulled them about critically, and Anselm, home for the holidays, has lifted the big boughs for his sisters to inspect. And the young ones are fairly content with the materials provided for their cunning workmanship, and in the evening wreaths and devices are being busily prepared for home decoration, the designers having been already all day at the schoolroom, working for the Church. Long festoons of the "dark ivy-plants," veined with white ; rich ripe brown berries of the same, made in two halves, like fairy cricket-balls ; cone-studded piles of spruce-fir ; other firs ; tasselled Weymouth pine ; prickly fancy firs, prettiest, that which has an under-side of frosted silver ; heaps of twinkling box ; large-leaved laurel, "scattering silver lights ;" "dark red-fruited yew ;" masses of scarlet-vermilion, which on examination are found to be holly, dressed all up the stalk with clustered berries, and crowned with a spike

of smooth, pale, warm-green leaves, pointed at the summit, and rich with darkest varnishing on the sky-side.

And oh, the berries this year (1868), after this hot long Summer! The hollies are berried up to the neck, and the yew-trees about the Wyndcliff were, in October, almost vying in glow of colour with the autumn tints of the wych-elms, and orange maple, and rose-flushed guelder-bushes. Then there is the prickly blue-berried berbrice, graduating in shades from a morocco-purple to the clearest pink-crimson; and there is variegated laurel, and a quite white holly, and some with yellow berries, and some chequered, and some dark with no berries at all. There is laurustinus also, but this fades too soon; there are what Christmas-roses were not required for the Font; there is a treasured bundle of winter-cherries, like little Chinese lanterns, the orange ball in the brown lace frame, or seeming to glow through the yet-clothed muffled-flame-coloured sides. There is pampas grass, and hoary traveller's-joy, saved from the November hedges, and carefully stored; there are the twisted burning clusters of the seed of the pale-flowered iris, so unkindly and insultingly named.*

And above all, there is the Mistletoe. The mistletoe, with its yellow-green leaves, and white pearl-berries. The mistletoe that, as Winter draws near, you may see distinct in such great bushes upon the stripped apple-boughs in the Herefordshire orchards. Great bushes well seen then, when the yellow leaves are few, and the red and the gold of the apples only scattered about the boughs: and the autumn day quiet, except for the chattering of the long-tailed magpies, so clean in their white and black, and the scream of the jays, with the mosaic of azure and jet on their

* *Iris foetidissima.*

wings. There was a charm in seeing these mistletoe masses,

“Print the blue sky with twig and leaf,”

—a charm, especially to those who knew it only from saunterings in Covent Garden, in seeing this magic plant really growing, growing too in wild, in profuse abundance. Oh, what a change for it, when it is hung up in the centre of the well-lit room, the room which shakes and vibrates with the dance; and the voice, not of jay and magpie, but of merry boy and girl, or romantic youth and maiden, or jovial senior, caught or catching, rings through its pale-fruited recesses.

There was much to do ere Kate, Violet, and Anselm were satisfied: many wreaths, much adorning of pictures and looking-glass, and Father to be coaxed out of his Study that that also might be dressed in Christmas garb. But the great event of the dressing; the climax and acme of all the decoration, the finishing touch to the whole, was undoubtedly the hanging that huge bush of mistletoe right in the centre of the hall, in whose ancient grate half an elm was burning for a Christmas log: and then the ruse for enticing the (of course) unsuspecting Father and Mother under the mystic plant, and smothering them with kisses when there. How should they suspect any such design? The little mystery had not been repeated more than a dozen times yet, as the years went by.

So the house has got on its Christmas dress, and is ready for the Christmas parties. We will let the Day, the sweet Day, the solemn Day, the happy Day, the holy Day,—pass; yet not quite without a word. This is a day like no other day in the whole year. Easter is perhaps more glad and joyous, coming with such sudden sunshine after the hush of Lent, and the

shade of Holy Week. Easter may be more ecstatically joyful, but Christmas has a strange, weird, child-charm of its own. The glorious mystery of the Waits, at midnight (before we have lost an enjoyment together with the child's heart, growing older and more learned, and so discovering that this is bad music played by unangelic men*) : the large Christmas moon shining, while we listen, through the snow-caked panes : the sweet and tender gladness of the bells, while we are dressing, and indeed, at intervals all through the day : the anticipation of the Christmas-boxes, whether new-milled money, or toy or workbox, or books, ranged upon the sideboard among a bewildering crowd of other treasures : the comfortable warm-berried evergreens over the mantelpiece, and about the walls : the Christmas texts over the arches in the church, the very same familiar texts, every one packed with a hundred fascinating associations, from earliest childhood upwards : the Christmas hymns, and the Pastoral Symphony played as the white-robed choir enters, and the clergyman passes to the wreathed reading-desk : the geniality and the kindliness and the affection which seem the very atmosphere of the Day : and, underlying all, the sweet and wondrous Story—of which we never weary, so long as any of the wise child-spirit is left to us : merely to enumerate these, however baldly, is to bring a distant peal of joy-bells near at once, and clear and loud across the heart. The Day itself is one obviously unfitted for noisy and altogether secular mirth : it is a day (beside its most dear and sacred memories and associations) sacred also to quieter, more intensely *happy* happiness ; sacred to home-gatherings, and reunions, and recon-

* The custom of sending the Church Choir to sing carefully prepared Carols, is obtaining more and more, and is an admirable substitute for the system familiar to our childhood.

cilements, and thankful joy because of no gap yet in the intimate circle, no bead fallen out of the home-rosary. Or of tender and dear reminiscences that make the joy not less thankful, but more quiet and grave: tightening the grasp of the living hands, while the eyes grow misty with thinking of one greeting less, one clasp that is loosed for awhile: one bead that has been passed on to a string that can never at all break or come untied. "A merry Christmas:"—yes, in a degree:—but merriment is the dance of bubbles that bead the deeper stream of the Day's grave happiness. Rather therefore, and more exactly, I will say, A happy *Christmas*, and a merry *Christmas season*. And saying this in print, I clasp, with no slack or insincere clasp, many a shadow-hand, many a hand from which oceans really part me: many a hand of which I only know this, that it shall turn the page which mine is penning.

Christmas time is especially and suitably the festival season of the young. Not but that the elders enjoy themselves as much, in their quiet way, as the wildest young hearts, or even perhaps more. But everything at this time seems to have the young in view. Old people and mature people fall in, as a matter of course, with the humour of the young ones at this time; thus you shall see, with no thought of any strangeness in the sight, Grandfather dancing Sir Roger de Coverley, and his son, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, playing at Blind-man's buff. 'Tis all for the children: and so your dignity is not compromised, and you may lay aside the gravity of your usual deportment, and give yourself up to a romp. Even the clergyman may take a share in the fun on such a plea, and not forfeit any of his influence for good: as who ever less revered the late Archbishop of Dublin, for hearing of his scuttling round the table on his

hands and knees, with his grandchild on his back ? It is to please the young ones : let this salve all : and so the old ones may enter with zest into the fun.

With zest not altogether, if at all, feigned,—I believe that that grave physician, whose coat-tail came off in my sister's hands (fearful position ! what *was* the child to do with the embarrassing acquisition ?) in the great struggle at oranges and lemons,—I believe that that grave man was in reality quite as eager in the contest as any of the excited train that were led by him to that miniature tug of war. And supposing you to be in the full swing of blind-man's buff : *was* it merely with a view to the ecstasy of the little ones that you so eagerly evaded the grasp, or palpitated, flattened against the wall, while the groping hands were just within an inch of your face ? or that you tried to look unconscious, with the slipper in your possession, and with frantic eagerness slid it away the moment the vigilant eye was at length turned from your post in the ring ?

Not a bit of it ; the elders unbend and condescend to the children's fun, but this is just their convenient excuse for having a turn at it themselves. It wouldn't do without the children, no doubt. For one thing, the decent pretext would be wanting ; and certainly I doubt whether, under any circumstances, there would be much enjoyment in " Cross Questions and Crooked Answers," or " Oranges and Lemons," or " Blind-man's buff," or " Hunt the Slipper," to a party composed merely of some dozens of staid merchants, and middle-aged lawyers, and stiff bankers, and solemn doctors, and reverend Bishops, together with a due proportion of mature matrons. It would hardly do, I fancy, without the Anselms, and Violets, and Mauds, and Kates, and Harolds, and Franklins,—to bring the old ones,—half reluctant at first, but seeming more so than

they really are,—to the games in which they are soon as interested as any. "That child's heart within the man's" has a lingering love, that will blaze out at Christmas-time, for the old child amusements still. Unfallen leaves, in the Autumn time that, if they have lost the soft texture and glory of the new green, nevertheless have not forgotten yet how, upon occasions, to glimmer in the sunshine, and to dance in the mellow air.

And the games, these are almost the best part of the Christmas parties. Who but remembers the old excitement of them, especially if they were games with forfeits attached, and if the forfeits were honestly insisted upon, and not meanly shirked, in deference to the scruples of some overprudent misses. Are not the loves of the young pretty and harmless? Need Belinda's grown admirers ever grudge that mad delirium which a kiss snatched from her twelve-years-old lips caused in Ethelbert's thirteen-years-old heart, on that ecstatic Twelfth-night evening? or the motto and the gold paper that, coming from the cracker pulled with her at supper, were stored for so long in the pocket-book which, at night, was always laid dearly under his pillow? I like boys to begin early to fancy themselves—if fancy it be—in love; it teaches them to look out of self, and also it keeps the heart's ground prepared and fertile, for the time when the true seed is sown. But of this more anon. I like girls to be a little wholesomely sentimental; we don't want them too practical at first: not dry and formal hay, before the graceful grass has bowed and risen and lightened and dusked in the least eddies of the lightest airs. I like children to be fresh and natural; and even when they have grown a little past child-days, they needn't be over-prim or straitlaced;—they needn't spoil the Christmas

games by taking all the innocent malice out of the forfeits.

And,—if you would test the truth of the secret which I whispered to you about the zest which the elders feel in the fun,—watch them, I beg, at one of these same forfeit-spiced games. Let it be “Birds, Beasts, and Fishes,” and let the knotted handkerchief suddenly fall into the lap of that genial, time-mellowed spinster Aunt, who has been nervously preparing her mind for the missile, almost dreading lest it should come her way. “Fish! one, two, three, four, five, six,”—“Er-rr-rr—Humbug!” she gasps at length, before the fatal “ten” is reached. But even when the scream of laughter lulls, and she is able to explain that she really did say, “Humming-bird,” it is found impossible to assign this individual to any species of the finny tribe; and so the dear old lady’s spectacle case is laid by with the other forfeits. Matters are not mended when, “Bird” being presently hurled at her, she—ready now after past experience, and with no hesitation—cries out, “Oyster!”

Her first forfeit was to measure six yards of love-ribbon with one of any number of nephews who would have been delighted to do this with dear Auntie Rachel; her next, to dance a hornpipe in the teatray; which, to the surprise of all, she consented to attempt. On one condition, however, which the mistress of the house disallowed: that the best set of Sèvres china should be left in it during the performance. Greatly did the kindly old heart chuckle at having thus turned the tables on her mischievous young friends.

To the young people themselves, one of the chief delights of the party is the preliminary looking forward to it: the excited preparation for it: possibly even the grave work of dressing for it. Where is this

sash? and is Ellen's hair done? and have Master Reggie's hands been boiled in hot water, to get the carpentering dust out of the frost-roughened fingers? It is such an important affair, and, at that time of life, such a lengthy operation; and then there is the solemn going downstairs, and ranging themselves in the empty room, cleared of the furniture, edged by benches all round the walls, lit by sconces placed about them at intervals. Stiff, and ill-at-ease at first, however anticipating happiness; fearful of deranging the exactly finished hair; feeling strange in shiny pumps or white satin shoes, sit Ella, and Beatrice, and Lily, and Robert, and William; legs dangling towards but not reaching the ground; while Mabel and Tom *will* race up and down the room, regardless of sit of sash, or of precision of hair. And other children come in and perch by them; and they are mutually shy and awkward,—for all the world as if they were grown English ladies and gentlemen waiting for dinner to be announced; and you would hardly fancy them the same children that are presently on such confidential terms, and so rampagiously full of enjoyment, when the first frost has thawed under the warming sunshine.

And they dance. I like to see children dance. I shall be frowned at by some, and pouted at by others; but I frankly own that I don't much like to see grown people dance. It is not now-a-days like the old, stately respectful style:—"slow" enough this would of course be voted. But,—I may be over-particular,—I can't reconcile the present style with my own queer ideas of the comeliness and the fitness of things. Let it be mere strangers whom I am watching, and the motion and the music may please me; and I may not take offence. But let me bring the thing home to myself: let it be my little maid Maud (laughing

in her cradle now, God bless her!), let her have grown to the grace of maidenhood, and let me suppose her in this room, and I, a wallflower of course, looking on. I shouldn't like it: I know I shouldn't. Why should that whipper-snapper young barrister dare to come and put his arm round her waist now, which he never would venture to do at another time; and smirk impudently right into her darling face? Why should young Featherweight, of the Guards, have any right to hug her round the room, his lanky form looming out of a mist of her muslin? Is it, think you, to consider too particularly to consider thus?—Well: I will not bring a sermon into a Christmas party, but will just retire upon the declaration from which I branched off into this cynic tone of thought:—and merely reiterate,—I like to see *children* dance.

But let me go back into the days of the past, and take one particular remembrance; recall one of those pleasant holiday evenings. I was not a child then, it is true; but certainly I enjoyed myself as though I were; besides, our evening's amusement was in this case one which might, without apology, enlist the interest of young and old too. I have been reserving the mention of this class of amusement, one well worthy to monopolize to itself some of the pleasantest of the holiday evenings. I shall describe, then, an evening of Charades.

Long ago now it seems, but let me bethink me how it had its origin. Ah, I remember. In a very small and quiet way we had, just among ourselves, got up an evening's amusement of this kind. "*Phantom*," our word was, and we exercised,—let me say without conceit, it being said of our past selves,—some ingenuity in one at least, of the scenes. It was the second: which was represented, I remember, by a

mighty black Cat on the tiles of a house. The snowy roof was rendered by a large sheet, ingeniously sloped over chairs and boxes, and roughened into blue-shadowed tiles with weak indigo and water. A young scion of the house made a first-rate cat, closed in a case of black calico, and with an appropriate mask, and artistic ears. The tail was a triumph of art: long, well-stuffed, and either nervously twitched according to one mode of cats, or lashed in a grand sweep,—by means of an invisible piece of twine, managed by a performer on the other side of the roof. This accomplice also managed (with deep vocal power) the howling and wailing, the actor of the part never having studied in the classes of any cat-Hullah. In the dim light, the effect was all that could be desired. The vocalists in the performance then retired to dress for the part of Brutus; the sheet reversed made an admirable tent (all but coming down in a heap, however, at the most solemn moment); a young girl in her early teens sang sweetly as Lucius the page; and a tall brother submitted to be nearly smothered in a yellow blanket, in order duly to represent the august Phantom. The light burned dimly; the composition and colour had been carefully studied; the curtain fell (happily *not* the tent), amid universal applause.

Well, from this tiny acorn sprang the larger growth, which is to be the subject of these reminiscences. A friend and neighbour had come in to spend that first merry evening with us, and had played his part as a spectator to perfection, having admired and been pleased with everything. What more could one require in an audience? But further than this, so impressed was he with the talent of the company and the arrangements of the manager, that he at once fixed an evening in the next week, at which, at his

own house, charades, on a larger and more ambitious scale, should be the staple of the entertainment. And to this he forthwith invited all the then assembled company, installing the getter-up of the minor entertainment at the head of the more extensive contemplated arrangements. And he threatened us with a far larger circle of spectators than that which had, at this time, applauded our modest merits.

However, our spirits rose to the occasion. Next day there was grave work in the selecting of words. And, after much overhauling of Shakspeare, Walter Scott, Pickwick, we decided upon two :—" *Pilgrimage*," and " *Incantation*."

Then came the critical inspection and planning of the rooms ; the dining-room, turned inside out, was all that we could wish for the arrangement of the charades ; there was a boudoir opening out of it in which the dressing could be managed ; and (the house being old-fashioned) a beam that ran right across the ceiling, leaving two-thirds of the room beyond it, made an admirable support for an extemporized curtain that should shut off the audience between the scenes.

Then came the allotment of parts, and the two fair daughters of the house were here a most valuable accession to our company. Some apportionments were obvious enough ; some required more consideration, but everything was soon settled : here beauty was wanted (putting the Manager in a very Paris-like position !) here voice, here memory, here portliness, here height, here good acting.

The next thing was, of course, the " properties" (I think that's the right word). And except that Mar-mion's helmet, and a wig and beard or two, had to be procured from London, all that we wanted was ingeniously manufactured at home. So we trudged up

every day, and turned the house of our friend into a workshop: witches' noses and chins; scallop shells and staffs for palmers; hoods for nuns; Pickwick's bald head and knee-breeches; King Lear's tow beard; Hecate's diadem, &c., littered the room which had been given over to our devices; until all was pronounced complete, and *à la bonne heure*; for the day had arrived.

Well: charades have been often described, but, nevertheless, if the "indulgent" reader has come so far with me, he or she will expect to be given just a peep at the result of such great preparations. Let me then make more vivid to myself the bright colour of that idle pleasant evening of the past, by rapidly passing in review before me on the page, the parts and the whole of those ancient but well-remembered performances. Idle days, but if they came after and preceded busy days, these shall not be grudged, nor sourly welcomed. They had their part, be sure, in the quality of the work which followed them; and if I, an Oxford man going in for "Mods," faced the examiners with a more equal mind than might have been expected from my ever present consciousness of what were my weak points, why, that idle time had had its share, undoubtedly, in this bracing of the mind's tone. Relaxation, in due proportion, is not waste time, although to the sterner purpose it may seem so. It feeds work, if it is not work. When you pour fresh water into your kettle, it ceases boiling for a while, no doubt. But it soon warms into the fizz and splutter again, which, indeed, would have prematurely stopped without it. Ah, life is so short, and there is, you perceive, if you are once at all in earnest, so much to be done in it, that one pardons the severe minds that grudge any pause of the wheels, even though it be to grease them, so that they shall get over more ground in the long run. One

sympathizes with their unflinching energy, and feels it necessary to apologize for, not only present, but even past, pauses in the advance. Yet, if great work be the end ever kept in view, it is certain that the work is even furthered by the intervals of rest from it.—Idle days then, that, kept within bounds, help on the busy ones.

Behold, then, the guests arrived, the Manager active and ubiquitous ; and the curtain just ready to be drawn on the first scene. This was a trifle ; we could not make very much of it ; "*Pill*," of course a vast globe of a nursery ball in a band-box ; and a poor child doomed to take it. The more artistic work began at "*Grim*." For this we had the Palmer scene in "*Marmion*:" the grisly warrior by the Hostel fire ; his squires and knights in armour about him ; partisans and bills resting against the oaken table ; stags' antlers on the walls—the stern Palmer, darkly draped and leaning on his staff, his grim look, and lit eye fixed still and ever upon uneasy Marmion—but let Scott speak, in words whose magic is ever of might :

“ Resting upon his Pilgrim staff
Right opposite the Palmer stood ;
His thin dark visage seen but half,
Half hidden by his hood.
Still fixed on Marmion was his look,
Which he, who ill such gaze could brook,
Strove by a frown to quell ;
But not for that, tho' more than once
Full met their stern encountering glance,
The Palmer's visage fell.
By fits less frequent from the crowd
Was heard the burst of laughter loud ;
For still, as squire and archer stared
On that dark face and matted beard,
Their glee and game declined.
All gazed at length in silence drear,
Unbroke, save when in comrade's ear
Some yeoman, wondering in his fear,
Thus whisper'd forth his mind :—

'Saint Mary ! saw'st thou e'er such sight ?
How pale his cheek, his eye how bright,
Whene'er the firebrand's fickle light
Glances beneath his cowl !
Full on our Lord he sets his eye ;
For his best palfrey, would not I
Endure that sullen scowl."

And then, called upon by Marmion, Fitz Eustace
(a Fitz Eustace had we, cunning in song) raises the
plaintive lay, set to an old air :

"Where shall the lover rest,
Whom the fates sever,
From his true maiden's breast
Parted for ever ?
Where, thro' groves deep and high,
Sounds the far billow :
Where early violets die,
Under the willow,"

Then the full deep chorus :

"Soft shall be his pillow.

"Where shall the traitor rest,
He, the deceiver,
Who could win maiden's breast,
Ruin, and leave her ?
In the lost battle,
Borne down by the flying,
Where mingles war's rattle
With groans of the dying,
There shall he be lying.

"Her wing shall the eagle flap
O'er the false-hearted ;
His warm blood the wolf shall lap
Ere life be parted.
Shame and dishonour sit
By his grave ever ;
Blessing shall hallow it,—
Never, O never !

Never, O never !

"It ceased, the melancholy sound,
 And silence sunk on all around ;
 The air was sad ; but sadder still
 It fell on Marmion's ear,
 And 'plained as if disgrace and ill
 And shameful death were near.
 He drew his mantle past his face,
 Between it and the band,
 And rested on his head a space,
 Reclining on his hand.—

* * * * *

"—Soon Lord Marmion raised his head,
 And, smiling, to Fitz Eustace said,—
 'Is it not strange, that, as ye sung,
 Seemed in mine ear a death peal rung,
 Such as in nunneries they toll
 For some departing sister's soul ?
 Say, what may this portend ?'
 Then first the Palmer silence broke,
 (The live-long day he had not spoke),
 'The death of a dear friend.'

Well, the curtain fell on a hush that was more valuable to us than the applause, which, like the crash of a wave that seems to hang for a moment, abundantly followed it.

The scenery was hastily changed. When the curtain was drawn "*Age*" was represented by a couch, on which lay the venerable Lear ; Cordelia kneeling by him, with half her hair fallen to the ground, and with anxious loving look. An element of comicality was undesignedly superadded here, by the fact of the aged king not having had time to learn his part, and being audibly prompted ; throughout betraying a ludicrous anxiety to catch the sense of the loud whisper which he then retailed to the audience :

"Pray, do not mock me :
 I am a very foolish fond old man,
 Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less :

And to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man ;
Yet I am doubtful, for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is ; and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments ; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night : Do not laugh at me ;
For as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA.—

And so I am, I am !"

"*Pilgrimage*" made a very pretty scene in dumb show ; changing the girls' faces so, and giving them a new charm, the brown hair and the gold hair all hidden by the white linen band over the forehead ; dark eyes or blue eyes, brunette or blonde complexion, enhanced by the unaccustomed confinement : and sandalled Palmers tall and draped in serge, and furnished with the pilgrim's staff, and with the scallop shell on the shoulder.

So the first charade ended amid much loudly expressed contentment.

Hast had enough, O Reader ? or shall I briefly sketch the next ? Are the thumbs turned down ? I will then do so in as few words as may be.

"*Inn.*" This was the famous scene in *Pickwick* : when that venerable man loses his way in the hotel, and takes possession of the middle-aged lady's room. What pains the Manager had to arrange the bed, curtains and all, and how impatient the audience began to wax : and afterwards how nearly Mr. Pickwick tumbled headlong out on to the floor, having, upon his first popping forth his head from the curtains, ventured too near the edge of the treacherous mattress ! However we were ready in course of time ; and the audience greeted Mr. Pickwick with a roar. His legs were extremely thin, and enveloped with great science in well-dissembled knee-breeches ; and

a bald head,—a triumph of art!—had been contrived by means of some white oil-skin. A strong sensation was produced by his bending to fold up his coat in front of the fire, his black sticks of legs being seen to the best effect. Indeed so prolonged and vehement was the merriment, as to cause some perturbation in the mind of the personifier of the character, as to the correctness of his attire minus his coat. However he disappeared in a recess behind the curtains, and presently a feeble snore proclaimed him lulled in his first sleep.

It was then that the middle-aged lady (he who whilome personified the cat) entered by another door. Her dress was rather short and scanty, and her appearance gawky; but the great hit lay in her taking it off, and appearing in petticoat and stays, and proceeding to take down her back hair. (This back hair also we held to be a triumph of our art.) It was at this moment (the snoring had suddenly ceased a little before)—it was at this moment that Mr. Pickwick's nightcapped head was cautiously protruded from between the curtains: anxious-eyed and spectacled.

"Hem!" said the lady, and in went Mr. Pickwick's head with automaton-like rapidity.

His *sotto-voce* comments on the horror of his situation; his appearance again, and his agonized watching of the process of the "hair-doing;" his convulsive clutches at his nightcap, which had got into a knot; his retirement behind the curtains, and loud "Ha—hum!" all this was keenly appreciated. But again the nightcap appeared in anxious survey; and, horror! the intruder had settled herself on a chair, and was gazing pensively on the fire.

"Most extraordinary female this," thought Mr. Pickwick, popping in again. "Ha—hum!"

The start of alarm: the dialogue behind the

curtains : the rush toward the door, checked by the final appearance of the nightcap :—this ended Scene first ; which appeared to be a decided success.

"*Cant*" was represented by that episode, in the same work, in which Mr. and Mrs. Weller and the red-nosed man come to see Sam Weller in the Fleet. The Manager himself took the part of Sam ; and made, it was said, a tolerably dapper personification of that character ; but the red-nosed man was the great success of this syllable. He was tall, and succeeded in the attainment of lantern jaws, and rolling eyes, and hair plastered tight to his head ; he sat rocking as though with perpetual English cholera ; and the look of the part was perfect. But the voice was a still greater triumph ; nor shall I forget easily the agony of laughter which it caused in the actors, when it first came suddenly upon them in the rehearsal : enhanced by the touch of genius that added four magic words to the original text,—the upturned eyes anxiously following Sam out of the room, and the nasal twang adding the pathetic suggestion "And a little spice!"

The liquor disposed of, and the hat and vast umbrella hastily gathered up, the scene ended, leaving the spectators in high curiosity and puzzle (they had already guessed the word), to know how possibly the remainder of it could be put before them. But the Manager had grappled with the emergency, and "*'ation*" was thus set forth, in a patched-up scene.

A Railway station : train just about to start : a lady and her maid enter. "Now, ma'am, where to?" (Real jacket and bell for guard : real railway barrow for luggage.)

"'Epney 'ation," the lady replies, and again and again reiterates. The maid on being questioned betrays the same defect of speech ; and the bell is ring-

ing just as "Stepney Station" is discovered to be the point desired. In the hurry a preoccupied porter dabs a large pasted label on to the forehead of a dandy who was lounging on the luggage truck, and, goaded by the bell, suddenly wheels him out, with his legs sticking up in the air (sending a servant among the audience nearly into convulsions): and so this scene ends.

Last scene of all: Macbeth and the witches. Caldron and all complete; witches throwing sprinkles of coloured fire into the flames: much smoke ('twas well that this was at the end): noses and chins and beards very effective: grand hand-in-hand dance round the caldron:

"Double, double, toil and trouble,
Fire, burn; and caldron, bubble!"

Then enter Hecate, handsome, and dark, and gold-diademed (since that time changed into the present writer's prudent and tender wife)—and then Macbeth; over six feet, kilted, with tartans, and fur purse, and dirk; naked legs; white socks sewn crossways with red tape. A grand, gloomy, and wild *incantation* scene. A sudden burst of blue fire from under the caldron; and before the ghastly effect dies out, the curtain is drawn, and the charades are over.

Supper then, and genial warmth down the back of Manager and performers at the hearty praise and profuse compliments: there is new delight in the talking it all over: the incidents, and the obstacles, and the mishaps, and the success upon the whole.

Then the roll of carriages

"Low on the sand and loud on the stone,"

and then the cosy crowded drive home.

Where are all the members of that pleasant com-

pany ? where all the spectators since then ? Scattered, I daresay, all about the world ; but perhaps some may be, by these pages, not unpleasantly reminded of that merry Christmas party. Well, the memories are pleasant and harmless ; and I shall never, for my part, be the manager of such frivolities (if you will call them so) again. I shall, however, I promise you, look on very benignly when Cyril and Maud are old enough to get up such an evening at home.





No. VII.

SOME FEBRUARY SNOWDROPS.

POPPIES in the Corn: Lighter Papers between Sermons." This elasticity, be it remembered, and freedom for general application, I claimed for my title, and so now I shall not wander out amid snow-bound fields in search of a fugitive glad hour, but content me with some random thoughts about a subject usually treated in thought and speech as of less than feather-weight. "*Light as love*," they say. But measles may kill, and the wise doctor will not neglect what may be scornfully called the diseases of infancy. Neither shall it be thought unworthy the leisure of a physician of spiritual maladies to turn his thoughts for an hour to this lightly-held, but sometimes maiming, sometimes fatal, disease of the mind—even *unrequited love*.

February, it happens, is my month for such thoughts. I like, let me confess, the harmless mirth or the graceful sentiment which bursts into such brief, fruitless, almond-blossom on the 14th of this month. There is a spray on life which, I daresay, has its use, certainly its opal-tinted beauty, admirable even to gravest eyes, if it come borne upon the bosom of deeper water. Hence I have, I own, a tender feeling towards the gentle fooleries of Valentine's Day. I have been known to send its missives myself:—nay, let me make a clean breast of it—I *do*, even now, send them to the

little ones. Ay, and for the twelve years of our engaged and married life, my prudent partner has twelve poetic meditations accumulated. And that once darling blossom of my youth, even Poesy, tended so fondly and carefully before, at last, the dry Summer coming, it fell away, leaving but a poor fruit-germ where it had rested a little while with rose and silver wing ;—that cherished nursling of the Spring seems to light life's bough again for a day when February comes round in the year. For I am bound at least then to pen some stanzas ; and the remembered glow almost comes back, and the once-felt thrill is faintly there, and I welcome back the old abstracted up-look after *the* word or the rhyme ; and I exult to behold it dawn clearly on thought's horizon. Yes, I love at such times to revert to past ambitious days, and to claim my small share in that pleasurable pain of which Wordsworth speaks. Let me quote his sonnet, never too often quoted :—

“ There is a pleasure in poetic pains
Which only poets know ; ’twas rightly said ;
Whom could the muses else allure to tread
Their smoothest paths, to wear their lightest chains ?

“ When happiest Fancy has inspired the strains
How oft the malice of one luckless word
Pursues th’ enthusiast to the social board,
Haunts him belated on the silent plains !

“ Yet he repines not, if his thought stand clear,
At last, of hindrance and obscurity,
Fresh as a star that crowns the brow of morn ;
Bright, speckless, as a softly moulded tear
The moment it has left the virgin’s eye,
Or raindrop lingering on the pointed thorn.”

Cruel February ; like a grim Giant with a bright Fairy for a captive, it grips this slight, graceful day,

and keeps it within its den ; you would hardly expect to light upon such a Butterfly in such an inclement month. And yet how often is February, stern February, the indulgent Gaoler also of the loveliest, sweetest day of the long year, letting it escape from that snow-bound cave, and wander out emancipated for the short furlough of its ephemeral existence !

The FIRST day of Spring: ay, this is February's child. And is there anything else so fair, as it hesitatingly passes forth from his lean arms ; its hair of too weirdly pale a gold ; its eyes of too unnaturally clear and dewy an azure ; its one or two bird-songs too sweet to accord yet with the unawakened sympathies of the numbed year ; its smile too wan, too ethereal to permit hope that its too early promise should last ? But you think not so much of its passing soon, as of its being here now, if you be of the more healthy, joyous temperament ; and you revel in the present genial hour, not forecasting how to-morrow the eager North, or the keen East, or a disgusting compound of both, may be stinging and icing your face, and turning your hands numb and livid. And it is the first warm sunshine to-day, if it shall be the ox-roasting fire half-way up the chimney to-morrow.

In truth a delightful thing it is, that saunter into your garden early on the first spring day. The cheery summer sound of the first bee past your ear ; the pleasant appearing of the over-brimming emerald in the buds of the gooseberry bush ; the nestward trill and twitter of the tiny fussy wren in the warm-tinted hedge ; the crocuses that have suddenly slipped their yellow yolks through the mould, or that have ventured to open wide in the warmth, and in which more bees are busy at work ; the bright pink hepaticas, catching the eye where only a little pile of naked stalks and dead leaves lay yesterday ; the sisterhood of snowy

drops trembling on their blue stalks, touched with that tinge of cold green for a blush—how often, in prose or poetry, and in nature, have these again and again appeared ; and yet, how ever new they are, as Winter unwillingly spares them from his grip.

And those are now tight-clenched buds, that shall be, in a few months more, the falling leaves, but now they feel a stir and thrill of life,

“Those blind motions of the Spring,
That show the year is turned,”

as the new warmth of the sun falls on them. Shut in those tiny caskets, the thousand varieties of shape and colour, crowding foliage, bud and blossom and fruit-germ, nascent in February, expectant in March, awake in April, impetuous in May, serene in June, heavy in July, grave in August, smitten in September, flying in October, falling in November, huddled in December, forgotten in January. Ah! they are in the stage now which the Hebrew Byron most commended. The fallen leaves he preferred to those yet on the wind-vexed, blight-attacked bough ; but the leaves in the bud, innocent yet of all sad and staining experience, he praised most of all :—

“Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.

“Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.”

And thus it is in February with the buds. Altogether, you see Nature yet in its swaddling-clothes, and a smile of much sweetness but of little meaning passes seldom over its baby-face.

I may well pass through the porch of thought con-

cerning that first untimely spring day straightway nipped by to-morrow's Winter, to musings on the subject which my title allegorizes. For—

“In the Spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast ;
In the Spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest ;

In the Spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove ;
In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of
love.”

And if I use the name of the pale forlorn February flower to describe that particular phase of the complaint which I have taken in hand to consider, why, I am but listening to an echo from a thought which I dressed in rhyme and rhythm, I remember, in old young days,

“When lucky rhymes to me were scrip and share,
And mellow metres more than cent for cent.”

In truth, I may honestly say that little do these grosser matters concern me even now ; none the less, however, has the press of life driven the rhyming into a corner. Be this as it may, thus I sang, after praising the lot of the Rose, the foster-child and favourite of Summer :—

“Not so with us, we but reflect
The pallid hue of Winter's snow,
And green, pale emblem of neglect,
Dwells, half-concealed, our leaves below ;
In folding gloom of cheerless skies
For us no kindly smiles appear,
The snow that on our petals lies
Can scarce glide down them in a tear.

“The winter wind, the biting blast,
Our only childhood's songs have been ;
The driving sleet, down drifting fast,
Beat on our leaves of tender green ;

Our bed, the cold and dreary snow ;
Our canopy, the leaden sky ;
Our fate, unnoticed here to grow ;
Our future lot, unmourned to die.

“And if perchance a sunbeam threw
Its light upon our leaves awhile,
Pale and uncertain was its hue,
And faint and chill its very smile ;
But soon the sun, now cold and dim,
Shall spend the warmth, to us denied,
On gayer flowers that smile on him,
When we, who loved him first, have died.

“And thus may love, a lonely flower,
Silent in some warm bosom grow ;
Pelted by sorrow's driving shower,
Hid by neglect's cold dreary snow ;
And tho' perchance more fair and pure
Than many a summer blossom gay,
Like us, it may uncheered endure ;
Like us, unmourned, in death decay.”

There now, I didn't know, until I wrote it down again, that that was such poor stuff. Never mind, I may take the taste out of your mouth with Tennyson and Browning presently. I go on, however, to gather from their haunts a handful of these snowdrops of which I am writing, and to examine them more particularly.

“The pangs of misprized love :” Hamlet reckons these in his list of the “shocks that flesh is heir to.” And these pangs are, in their turn, misprized. Is there anything more certain to be the butt of scorn and ridicule, even of ferocious contempt—for those who have passed through life's romantic flower-copses into its more commonplace ordered garden—than is this anguish of unsuccessful love ? Yet is there (turn back memory's leaves and see) any anguish at all

comparable to the torment of this, while it lasts? Suicide, madness, and murder—these have been in all ages some of the symptoms of the complaint the mention of whose existence as a real disease will hardly be tolerated with patience by some people. “Stuff: nonsense: sickly foolery: childish folly: the silly dreams of boy and girl!” Ah! they have left far behind all that old delicious or agonizing madness; so far behind, that the very memory of it has gone. Or they have been so little careful to keep up even a small flowerplot in the heart, that is now turned into a dull, useful, vegetable garden, that, remembering those old feelings, they pish and pshaw them in a veritable anger at ever having been guilty of such unreasonable, unbusinesslike conduct. Yet, as a fact, that crusty old merchant, who now has nothing better than a grunt or a snub for the patient matron his wife, did once in old days, forty years ago, walk up and down his room, one whole night, in absolute agony, upon some astute move of that wily and capricious beauty, and underwent the same exercise the next night, in simple ecstasy, because she had, beyond his dreams, granted a kiss and a raven tress. What losses or profits since that time have, really, ever stricken or elated his heart like those? Ah! it is far back in the years, that old time of generous and unselfish devotion, when

“Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands;

Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;

Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight.”

That old time, that old magic once cast over life, that delicious dream-time:—all is forgotten now, or re-

membered but to be indignantly repudiated, "*I was a fool then, Sir.*" It may be so. But not all those self-absorbed curmudgeons, who thus speak to the young hearts that timidly urge precedent on their own behalf, are necessarily wiser now. And, at any rate, there must still be, in every case almost, folly (if love be the badge of this), to be tolerated until the dust or the drought of the Summer have toned down all that tender greenness of the Spring.

To me there is something peculiarly attractive of sympathy in the feelings that (perhaps in *some* degree wholesomely for them) meet with such rough and unceremonious treatment from those who have outgrown them. For this *is* it : the feelings are outgrown. Our life is short, but we pass through divers stages in it, and the next forgets the preceding : and at the end, instead of having laid by a store of useful memories, it is often as though we had never experienced the earlier stages at all. Just watch, for instance, and see if you will not catch yourself growling very unallowingly at the children's noisy romps ; and yet that quicksilver was in *your* limbs and lungs once. How keen a reproach that naïve remark of the children bears for many a gruff old Fogy—

"Mother, do you think Grandfather will be in Heaven?"

"Yes, my child, I hope so. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, then, I'm sure *we* don't want to go there. For he'll come grumbling and scolding in, '*Humph, humph, what are these children doing here?*'"

And much so is it apt to be with the treatment received by the youths and maidens. Who would ever surmise, considering the terrific or the mortifying affair that their lovemaking is often made to them by the elders, that those old hopes, anxieties, and ecstasies had ever lashed the staid waters of the

parental hearts? Oh, we should try, more than we do, to throw ourselves and our sympathies, and our memories, into our children's ages, from infancy upwards! That is the kindest and the wisest mature or old age, to which the wee things, and the boys and girls, and the lovers, alike love to come, and to bring their confidences. It has been an old idea with me that it would be well if we could photograph our—what shall I say?—metaphysical selves at the different stages of life. It is, I repeat, quite remarkable to note how fast we not only outgrow, but forget them. Was the B.A. ever a Freshman, can we suppose; or the Don ever an undergraduate? Was the Squire ever a younger brother, or the Archdeacon ever a poor curate with three children, and 150*l.* a year? Was the schoolmaster ever a schoolboy; or the parent ever a lover; or the elder brother ever a little dancing two-year old? Every age has its delicate snail-horns, which it tentatively puts out, but which the next age rudely brushes, that they soon learn to shrink into themselves. But it was, believe me, a flaw in wisdom thus to repel them.

But my special subject has been kept waiting. Peculiarly and above all, then, it is this timid and lonely flower of *unrequited love* that meets the most wintry storms and unsympathetic skies. Those even who have a little patience for smooth and commonplace love-making have rarely any at all for this. Galling sneers; abuse of the object that the sensitively generous heart would guard from even a thought of blame; repeated expressions of amazement at the infatuation which can persist in seeing ought to love in one so unresponsive, dull, uninteresting; and you don't notice how the pale listener winces and writhes under the torture. You are impatient with him, you

are at a loss to think why he cannot at once throw off the trammels. But time was when those silken fetters found yourself a helpless captive : and the odd thing is, that by his case you are not at least reminded of those old days. I suppose the reason will be partly that you are not in love with the *him* or the *her* in question, and you will not or cannot throw yourself into the position of one who is so. What they can see in them to cause such infatuation, you can't understand. *They* can, however, and that is just the difference. Your goose is their swan.

And besides, I suppose in many cases that early poetry of life has been allowed to wane quite into the prosaic. You have kept *no flowers*, as I said, in the kitchen garden : the lover died out of the husband long ago. Your heart has long been unstrung, and there are now no responsive chords for the most cunning hand to sweep. So where sympathy was sorely wanted, you administer a snub—nay, a handful, a good many handfuls, of them ; where a kindly word was craved for, you had but a growl to give ; where wise, strong advice was sought, you gave a scolding or a sneer. And all, I dare say, because you had forgotten your old experiences, and did not really know what a wound that was that you were dressing with brickdust, or sprinkling with vitriol.

But there is no mistake about the feeling, when you do have it. It is a real anguish then to you, at any rate, however difficult it be to sympathise with, or even to tolerate, in after life, in another. Lovers are bores often, I know, just as are some parents about their children. But I am not talking of those who weary other people by their confidences, but of those who have a real agony, that rather would have to be coaxed from them, than be laid bare to every gaze. "*She never told her love*"—that is hackneyed, but yet

a story that repeats itself continually. Grant that (happily) the tragic end is not the common end ; that deep wounds heal, and perhaps hardly leave a scar after a while ; that time and change happen to all. Yet you are not to refuse sympathy to one racked with toothache, because by next year it will probably have lulled, nor to refuse to prescribe for a fever, because some years hence it may be almost a forgotten experience.

There is a quiet heart-broken pathos about a poem of Hood's, "*Fair Inez*," which poem may well come in here, if but as a song to relieve the reading :—

"O saw ye not fair Inez ?
She's gone into the west,
To dazzle when the sun is down
And rob the world of rest ;
She took our daylight with her,
The smiles that we love best,
With morning blushes on her cheek,
And pearls upon her breast.

"O turn again, fair Inez,
Before the fall of night,
For fear the moon should shine alone,
And stars unrivalled bright ;
And blessed will the lover be
That walks beneath their light,
And breathes the love against thy cheek
I dare not even write !

"Would I had been, fair Inez,
That gallant cavalier,
Who rode so gaily by thy side
And whispered thee so near !—
Were there no bonny dames at home,
Or no true lovers here,
That he should cross the seas to win
The dearest of the dear ?

"I saw thee, lovely Inez,
Descend along the shore,

With bands of noble gentlemen,
And banners waved before ;
And gentle youths and maidens gay,
And snowy plumes they wore ;—
*It would have been a beauteous dream,—
If it had been no more !*

“ Alas, alas, fair Inez,
She went away with song,
With music waiting on her steps
And shoutings of the throng !
But some were sad, and felt no mirth,
But only music’s wrong,
In sounds that sung, Farewell, Farewell,
To her you’ve loved so long !

“ Farewell, farewell, fair Inez,
That vessel never bore
So fair a lady on its deck,
Nor danced so light before.
Alas, for pleasure on the sea,
And sorrow on the shore !
The smile that blest one lover’s heart
Has broken many more !”

Ah yes, it was no joke, you may be assured, that turning home to the blank life, after the rose-touched sail had dipped below the horizon.

Then, while I am about calling witnesses, I need but refer to Locksley Hall, with its masterly picture of a heart’s sweetness all turned sour, or of a heart’s green and silver flower-meadow all ploughed up. But what poet is there who has not had his word or his simile on the subject ?

“ How beautiful the yesterday that stood
Over me like a rainbow ! I am alone.
The past is past. I see the future stretch
All dark and barren as a rainy sea.”

Thus Alexander Smith tries to set before us that peculiar, utter blank which, under the circumstances

we are now contemplating, seems to fall upon life. Wordsworth has his image for the same desolation :—

“ This soft warm heart, once free to hold
A thousand tender pleasures, thine and mine,
Is left more desolate, more dreary cold
Than a forsaken bird's-nest filled with snow
'Mid its own bush of leafless eglantine.”

It is curious, and laughable or touching, according to your mood, and belief or disbelief in the abiding of these paroxysms of the soul, to note how a weary craving for death—most commonly for the soldier's death—haunts this phase of feeling, as in poetry, so often in real life.

“ I had been content to perish, falling on the foeman's ground,
When the ranks are rolled in vapour, and the winds are laid
with sound.”

We have the sad earnest of this fancy in the exquisite story of Elaine : and her song shall suffice for a rare instance of the mournful yearning, proving to have been indeed a prophecy :—

“ And in those days she made a little song,
And called her song ‘ The song of Love and Death,’
And sang it : sweetly could she make and sing.

‘ Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain,
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain ;
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

‘ Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must be :
Love, thou art bitter ; sweet is death to me.
O love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

‘ Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away ;
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay :
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

‘ I fain would follow love, if that could be ;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me :
Call, and I follow, I follow ! let me die.’ ”

Coventry Patmore, however, is, it must be allowed, pre-eminently the Bard of Love. And beautifully he pleads its cause, and redeems it from the charges brought against it by those who have outgrown it, of frivolity, and of being a thing too slight for the attention and consideration of grave men. It wakens men to beauty, he says;—to religious thought, he might have added. For generally the world is a closed volume to the dwellers in it :

“ An idle poet, here and there,
Looks round him ; but, for all the rest,
The world, unfathomably fair,
Is duller than a witling’s jest.

“ Love wakes men, once a lifetime, each ;
They lift their heavy lids, and look ;
And, lo ! what one sweet page can teach
They read with joy, then shut the book.”

How true this is : for you may note that even the dullest and most prosaic mind will, at the call of Love, “ lift its heavy eyes,” and behold something of the beauty that lay around unknown as a paradise-land to the traveller in a fog. He looks up, however, now, and the fog, that was indeed the atmosphere of his own mind, lifts, and he catches a glimpse of the beauty of nature, of the beauty also of high and generous qualities ; of the beauty of things that are true, of things that are honest, of things that are just, of things that are pure, of things that are lovely, of things that are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise. He becomes, at least in susceptibility, a Poet for the nonce ; aye, and even the careless worldling is led by a pure love to some vague yearnings for and feeling after the highest beauty, of religion. I have often noticed this ; it is, I think, found almost as the rule, in a pure

unselfish love. I might say much as to the reason why ; I *will* only say that I suppose that when a Sunbeam rests upon our brow, it naturally calls up our thoughts towards the Sun.

And here, you see, the loser may be very greatly a gainer. For how often, the prize won, the heavy lids fall again : and the fleeting light of higher thought and higher feeling leaves the face blank and vulgar.

“The gulf o’erleapt, the lover wed,
It happens oft (let truth be told),
The halo leaves the sacred head,
Respect grows lax, and worship cold ;
And all love’s May-day promising,
Like songs of birds before they pair,
Or flush of flowers, in boastful Spring,
Dies out, and leaves the Summer bare.”

But the *unreturned love* keeps all the poetry and the dream-beauty :—its owner never reaches the mirage, and so he never can find bare sand where it was. Bright, and beautiful with a heart-aching, witching, magic loveliness, all that sweet anguishing dream of the heart’s youth always dwells on the horizon of his life ; it edges and borders it perpetually with beauty, though this be of a kind that is watery and misty, unreal and unsubstantial, seen through the dazzle of tears. This loser of the substantial reality gains at least the unmarred Ideal through life. I often think of this as I look at the Dante and Beatrice of Ary Scheffer. How beautiful that grave, worshipping (I use the word in its ancient sense), upward look ! Ah, might not, I ask, the magic glory of the Sunrise have died, even here, into the mere useful light of common day, but for the fate which fixed it in everlasting morning ? What a lovely spiritual thing does unrequited love appear in Dante’s life ; and how

exquisitely allegorical seems the choosing of that unselfish earth-love to be the guide *that showed to him Heaven*.

Ay, here, "where all things limp and halt," we lose often in winning ; and the blossom falls, when the fruit is come. And every butterfly's wing, with us, if our clumsy hands grasp it, loses some of the fine feather-dust. *It remains perfect*, as it dances away from you over the corn.

So the unrequited love has its profit, if men will hold to its compensation, and will not, as some, alas, do, nestle down in a sty, out of despair because they cannot reach some bright particular Star. It has its profit ; and may much ennoble, raise, and sublimate the heart that is forced to keep its pure fire to feed upon itself because other fuel is denied it. Coventry Patmore has some wise words bearing upon this :

"If fate love's dear ambition mar,
And load his breast with hopeless pain,
And seem to blot out sun and star,
Love, lost or won, is countless gain ;
His sorrow boasts a secret bliss
Which sorrow of itself beguiles,
And love in tears too noble is
For pity, save of love in smiles.
But looking backward thro' his tears,
With vision of maturer scope,
How often one dead joy appears
The platform of some better hope !
And, let us own, the sharpest smart
Which human patience may endure,
Pays light for that which leaves the heart
More generous, dignified, and pure."

Now I contend that this neglected and slighted snowdrop, this nursling of unkind and inclement skies, is worthy of this graver, wiser, deeper considering. It is the fit object for tender regard, for courtly

treatment, for delicate respect. The coarse intrusion, the easy sneer, the rude reprimand, should be hushed in the presence of a real keen anguish, a high and holy feeling, a loneliness also that seems to set the soul in an empty world, with God alone to speak to.

“Yea, God doth know, and only God doth know ;
Have pity, God, my spirit groans to Thee !
I bear Thy curse primæval, and I go ;
But heavier than on Adam falls on me
My tillage of the wilderness ; for lo
I leave behind the woman, and I see,
As ’twere, the gates of Eden closing o’er
To hide her from my sight for evermore.”

The loneliness of bereavement is no loneliness compared to his who cannot win love. The possession of love is inalienable ; once attained, and kept till death. The person is removed, but not the love. But he who has not even the love has nothing.

Yet, this thing, Love, is just a sample of what Browning calls

“Earth’s true food for men,
Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet.”

And a sample of the former is the keen feeling of the unsuccessful man, that he is unappreciated, not understood ; that if she really knew him, she would and must love him. And this not from conceit ; I don’t mean that : I mean that it has its rise from that dignity of self-belief which true unselfish love gives a man a right to have. (If I quote poetry again, you shall excuse this, when the theme is love.) So the gentler heart, that finds the less worthy, but more showy, rough heart win his treasure from him, will thus muse :

“But in the world I learnt, what there
Thou too wilt surely one day prove,
That Will, that Energy, though rare,
Are yet far, far less rare than Love.”

And he consoles himself with the vague hope that, somehow, things will right themselves in another state.

"Yet we shall one day gain, life past,
Clear prospect o'er our being's whole ;
Shall see ourselves, *and learn at last*
Our true affinities of soul."

To pass on to quaintnesses of our subject, Browning's "Last ride together" gives one of the most whimsical ways of taking a refusal : also a most philosophic string of consolations. The poem is a vast favourite with me. And most happy is that exquisite extravagance in the "Angel in the House," which makes the bridegroom the envier of the unselfish nobility of the rejected lover :—

"We left him looking from above ;
Rich bankrupt! for he could afford
To say most proudly that his love
Was virtue and its own reward.
But others loved as well as he,
(Thought I, half angered,) and if fate,
Unfair, had only fashioned me
As hapless, I had been as great."

But I might run on for many pages more, with chat and quotation, upon this eternal subject. I shall however, do well to end my slight "*Caprice*:" and if in doing so I touch a rather deeper note, be assured that without doing thus I could not strike the octave. I shall do this in rhyme, giving for the malady a prescription which I find labelled "Bitter Herbs."

"Wild roses wreathe their glowing arms
The barren rock above ;
In the deep grove's most hidden part
Cooeth the tender dove ;
But not to every human heart
Cometh the meed of love.

"A nest forsaken, on a tree
Withered, and sere, and dry ;
A rose-bush, in its pride of bloom,
Uptorn and left to die ;
A wreck upon a wide waste sea,
Nor hope nor succour nigh :—

"These all are blithe and happy things
That outcast thing beside,
A heart that yearns for love's dear grace,
And still must be denied ;
And fain would fill the desert place
With bitter growth of pride.

"—And yet, and yet, there *is* a love
None ever sought in vain ;
A love that shines with tenfold power
Upon the heart again ;
That to Eternity's last hour
Unchanging shall remain.

"And thou, who mourn'st an earthly love,
Ventured without return ;
Listen ! The voice of LOVE Himself
Biddeth thee cease to mourn :
He takes from Thee the twining growths
With which thy soul was bound,
And bids thee grow a stately plant
Within His garden ground !"

Yes, and besides, for those who rightly seek it, a present sweet in the bitter, there is, believe me, a hope beyond, for every pure and godlike spark nursed on the heart's often desolate hearth. With grand notes to this effect I end here my playing with the keys.

"There shall never be one lost good ! What was, shall live as before ;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound :
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more ;
On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven, a perfect round.

"All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good, shall exist :
Not its semblance, but itself ; no beauty, nor good, nor power,
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,
When Eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard ;
Enough that He heard it once ; *we shall hear it by-and-by.*"





No. VIII.

CRICKET GENERALLY, AND A DAY AT LORD'S GROUND IN PARTICULAR.

OF course I am an Oxford man. I don't say this with any the least implied disparagement of Cambridge. I only mean that for the man of either University, the feelings, the ideas, the sympathies, the preferences, the associations, are so utterly and entirely wedded (in this case none may forbid the banns) to our particular *alma mater*, that we could not in our wildest imagination, realize the belonging to her Sister, and, always in some measure, her Rival. Therefore, if you are an Oxford man, *of course* you are an Oxford man: how *could* it have been otherwise? And *vice versa*, obviously, with Cambridge. The same, too, with the public schools. While at school, and full of its eager emulation, ay, and later, even throughout life, could a Harrow boy conceive the possibility of his being or having been an Eton boy; or the Etonian become in idea a Harrovian; or Winchester change across hypothetically with either? No; the three corners of the triangle may seem to us "much of a muchness,"—"Cæsar and Pompey berry like, 'specially Pompey;"—but each, in the mind of its constituent parts, has its special and sacred individuality, and no atom located in one could entertain, as other than an absurd dream, the conception of having been incorporated into another. A miniature

nationality is this, no doubt ; we are apt to fall into societies, wheels within wheels, and to identify ourselves with that one particularly in which we happen to be spokes, or even nails. There never can be, we are convinced, another so round, or so well greased, as our own wheel. Yet a disinterested observer might contend that really the fellow wheel did its work about as well, and was not very different in its look. And no doubt this might be well said of those sister wheels which at any rate can be distinguished, we may triumphantly say, by the painting—one being pale and one the darkest blue.

And thus you would soon have perceived, as you invisibly advance with me, by easy stages, to Lord's Ground, that the dark blue colours are those pinned on my coat. I am, however, not pressed for time in sauntering towards that goal ; and I am meditating a general reminiscent chat on the way about the noblest of outdoor sports.

The noblest of outdoor sports—yes, neither boat-ing nor any other shall win from it this well-deserved palm. Consider the Science of it ; the interest of it, the duration of it, the healthy and manly exercise which it calls forth : the variety of the skill brought into play, and the separate study required for proficiency in each different part, as the batting, the bowling, the wicket-keeping, the fielding. Ay, special excellences required and to be developed for each place in the field ; so that there shall be in England but one point, say, as Julius Cæsar (I write of the past ; I am behindhand in cricket knowledge now)—one backstop, as Mortlock ; one wicket-keeper, as Lockyer ; or again, a prince of batsmen, as Parr ; a king-bowler, as Wisden ; once and away, that admirable Crichton, the man pre-eminently good all round, as Caffyn. See the faculties that are called into play : the quickness of eye,

the strength of muscle and sinew, the precision, the vigilance, the coolness, the judgment—the science, I repeat. Look at the *mind* brought to bear on, for instance, first-rate bowling; the special pitch calculated, the particular rise, the subtle swerve, and all with a view to the peculiar batting of the man then in. Mark, again, not only the neat batting, the ease and grace with which bailer, shooter, twister are defeated, and Gibraltar still intact, but consider more deeply the science of it. Now the ball rips along the turf, never ascending towards the hands, far away between two fieldsmen: now steals between slip and point for one safe run: and then there is the exact clear judgment of the run—the crown of the batsman's skill;—not one lost, yet no half-bred rashness and crude excitement. Note further the generalship brought into play, and indeed most indispensable, and see the wary captain arranging his field with a view to this or that batting or bowling. And the tyro goes in, gives just the chance that was planned for, and succumbs, while the initiated admire. But it is still better to see the equal skill of the defence triumph for a while over the consummate skill of the attack.

Well, I have yet further praise for this king of games, even as the gentle Izaak Walton could consume page after page in commendation of his loved craft. I shall not, however, to match his particularity, give a disquisition upon “the nature of Turf in general; the best kind to be chosen for the Ground; the method of laying it down, of rolling and keeping it:” passing on to touch on “the differences of Trees, the many varieties of the Willow, its special fitness for the wood of the Bat:” with a slight discussion as to “the composition and qualities of Whalebone, Cane, Thread, and Cobbler's wax;” and then on to “the divers

species of Animals that there be in the world ; the preparation of their Hides for the making of Leather ; and which of these so-prepared skins shall best suit the purposes of Dark or Duke." But pardon, old Walton,—this is the banter of thine admirer.

Avoiding such voluminous treatment of the game, let me go on at once to my next head of praise. And this is that Cricket is singularly healthy, and free from exceptions which have been taken to what I may call its sister sport, at the Universities, namely, Boating. Far be it from me to decry this graceful and manly exercise ; but I may be allowed to praise my own client somewhat at its expense. Besides, then, that I think that Cricket excels in the wider range of various powers and faculties called forth by it ; besides that the Cricket match gives days, while the Boat-race gives but minutes of pleasure (and I think that, in weighing the two, this *is* a consideration) ; besides these excellences, there cannot be urged against Cricket the objection that—justly or not I shall not stop to decide—has been brought against rowing, rowing, I mean, in a race, namely, that of excessive exertion, damaging hereafter to the constitution. I do not say that this *is* a necessary consequence of rowing ; I only contend that Cricket is free even from the suspicion of it. And with fine rosy boys that are to you as the apple of your eye, *this* consideration will also have its weight.

Moreover, there is one great blemish from which Cricket is at least freer than most sports, those, at any rate, which have in them anything of the racing character. And this vice is *Betting*. I am not about now to take up the graver objections to this practice—to do so would be considered out of place in poppy-papers—but I take my stand on the slur cast by it (in my opinion) on any sport whose interest in great

measure depends on it. And I say that a sport which is worth the time given to it ought to be able to stand alone without such machinery strapped on to it, otherwise it must be a poor sinewless affair. What would you think of sherry which was too poor to drink without pouring neat brandy into the decanter: or of ale that wanted gin in it; or of gin that wanted vitriol? These are homely illustrations, but they may express what I mean. Now of course people *will* bet upon Cricket, as they will bet upon every conceivable contingency whatsoever. You can't keep the possible or even the probable earwig out of even your whitest rose. But the interest of Cricket would not fall through, would not appreciably deteriorate or flag, if the whole betting cancer were cut out of it. There is always the noble manly game, with its own intense excitement and interest of a sound and wholesome kind; not the fevered mouth and stopping heart of the man who sees money in the one scale, and insolvency, rascality, suicide perhaps, in the other; nay, not the diluted compound of this feeling which one may trace in young girls even and amateur book-makers. Without all this diseased interest, there is, spite of the science and skill of the game, enough of hazard and uncertainty, to make (in a critical moment of the match) every ball delivered stop the heart's beating for a moment; every run gained, an ecstasy;—and that last cut for five, that decides the victory, a very "order of release" for the cheers.

Let me see, what does a wise man—no parson, only old Aristotle,—say about betting? As nearly as I remember, he calls it a species of the genus Covetousness—covetousness diluted—the genus turned into negus, to make an extempore anagram,—but still *of the family*. And, looked straight in the face, I think it will appear to be so. And if a sneer meets

me here, at the notion that the players in society care really for the small stakes, I simply reply, Watch, next time you have the chance, and judge for yourself. Covetousness has more to do with the excitement than most would acknowledge, or perhaps even guess. Nor can I understand or believe in that friendship or hospitality which, under any pretence of play or sport, gets its hand into a friend's pocket, and lightens it of what is sometimes not even spare cash. Verily, I'd rather pass some from mine own purse into that of a needy friend, or at any rate go without many things that might be desirable to have—such as dinner or a new book,—than supply them in such a sorry way. But then my idea of friendship, of hospitality, of courtesy, may be peculiar. I should, to say no more, consider such a method of replenishing my purse—or filling my glove-box—as essentially *ungentlemanly* or *unladylike*. Enough.

“Thou comest in such a questionable shape
That I will question thee.”

But the shadow is gone, and I am a man again ; and free to give my thought to the grand game.

What right have I to talk of it so much? Am I a Cricketer now? a “cricketing parson?”* Far be such an imputation from me ; had I the inclination, care for my influence for good over my people must forbid its indulgence. But was I ever a good Cricketer? and can I, in memory, fight over again old well-fought battles and campaigns? Not even this. No; I will let you, kind reader, into my secret. I had certain younger brothers whose prowess in the cricket-field was the subject of much complacent satisfaction to me, and whose talk, during

* Let it be noted that I do not include in this term the man who innocently resumes his redoubtable bat for an occasional game.

the cricket season, was scarcely of aught else but great matches and mighty players. Indeed they were cricket-mad. So at that time, with very little effort, I was well up in not only the game, but the names and special qualifications of the Players of the day, Professionals and Gentlemen ; could have almost passed a moderate examination on the subject. Without knowing them, sometimes even without having seen them, we conceived fervid admiration or rooted dislike towards certain of the champions in the mimic war ; each of our fraternity, indeed, had his special pets. *Caffyn* and *Julius Cæsar*—I think that these were mine : and I remember that one of my brothers conceived a violent furor for *Sherman*, then the Surrey bowler, and would presume to uphold him against the majority of our fraternity, who, with the rest of the world, were *Wisdenites*. But then, had he not seen and talked with him at his own house at Mitcham ? and this, in that cricket-charged atmosphere, was held much such an honour as now a personal acquaintance with Tennyson or Browning would be. Especially before we ourselves excel in any pursuit, what demigods the adepts in it appear to us ! For it is notorious that the young are prone to hero-worship.

And my brothers were not, at first entering the larger cricket-world, adepts. They hung fire, so to speak, a little. We were of sufficient number to be companions to each other without seeking external supply ; and perhaps too much (being also very united) confined our sports to our own lawn and fields. And, when it happened that we fraternized with a school in the village, and got ourselves chosen into their Wednesday afternoon games, we (being elder) were so *facile principes* that we learned to think rather well of our play, and indeed soon found ourselves

shut out of the game in which we had begun always to take the lion's share of the fun.

It was just then that we were urged to join a neighbouring Club. And here it was our lot to find our level, and to become no longer heroes flushed with victory—the Achilles, and Ajax, and Diomed of the field—but rather raw recruits, in need of the elements of drill. And for a while we sung very small upon the tented field: were misprized on the Practice days: were shut out of the Matches. Well, well, for my own part, I, before very long, found out that, for many reasons, my suitable place in the cricket-field was on the spectators' bench. That I was out of my ground if I was far from my study chair; and that my fielding was better done if it were done alone, wandering through bobbing clover and broad-leaved wheat. So I yielded the point and gave my companions the slip, and set a long stop to my bowling. But I used to remind those brothers of mine,—when better days came upon them, and they had warmed to the work, and were valued members of the Club,—of how indeed I had been the earliest trainer that they had had, and of how time was, when I was wont to take the three of them, and at last resign the bat, merely some ten years or so before they came out and I retired.

There are few triumphs more delightful than to shine out a hero when you had been thought a "muff"—and did not I share half the delight of that triumph, when I received a letter from one of these lightly-held brothers of mine, giving the details of a match in which, out of sheer desperation for want of men, he had at last been included? I suppose that, steadily and unnoticed, he had been practising his defence; at any rate I know he took me and every one else by surprise. No one, it appeared, was willing to go in

first on our side, and accordingly the Captain sent him to the wickets. And there he stayed, long, and wary, and impregnable, not hitting much, but gradually creeping up to the score of the day; seeing wicket after wicket fall, but still guarding his own, imperturbable, tall, steady, scarlet as to his flannel shirt, killing the bowling, and knocking off the bowlers: carrying his bat out, at last, amid a perfect ovation of his amazed allies. Another brother had done well: and one more had fallen into that steady style which he has since never quitted. As thus; first ball, four; second ball, six; third ball, out! A short life and a merry one.

Oh, those old cricketing days! I was always a keenly-interested spectator, and even now, on those rare occasions,—once, perhaps, in two years,—on which I see a good match, I feel that I can hardly have a greater treat. But I am fain to recall the sunny summer afternoon, at dear old Oxford, when, over-persuaded by the merry and genial band, I should one day mount the Drag that rattled along over Magdalene Bridge, and towards Cowley Meadows. The exhilaration of the day, of the scene, of the company: what company, for the old real gay-heartedness, is ever like that now grave-grown Oxford band; the chosen few, the friendly many? And the Schools were left behind; what matter now if there still lurked a passage or two in Homer or Æschylus in which a subtle examiner could stump us? We find it easy at such a time to think the best even of examiners, and to hope that they will rather exercise their pains in ascertaining what we know, than, with misdirected ingenuity and indecent curiosity, in labouring to discover what we don't. Give them the benefit of the doubt at least; and take in the gladness of an idle day when we are young. 'Tis then,

and then only, that we really *enjoy* them. We get out of the way of merely enjoying life when we age or begin to age. We look at the *rest*, as the great pleasure of such days when youth has gone.

How we revel in our holidays, in boyhood, in youth ! Retired from business : that, perhaps we think, must be the intensity of delight ; life's drudgery all over, a time of ALL HOLIDAYS. So the schoolboy dreams : so even the University man, expecting a time when examinations shall be things of the Past, and examiners sink into the rank of mere ordinary fellow mortals, instead of sitting, as we deem of them :

"On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind,
For they lie beside their nectar, and their bolts are hurled
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curled
Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world :
Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands."

So even children (I mused in my nursery to-day), so even children would waive the solid portion of the dinner and have it all pudding. And like them *we care only for the pudding*, in youth ; at least it seems as though to have it and nothing else would be delightful ; all holidays ; no meat : "no satis to the jams." But when we are grown old, and may now at our will have all pudding,—lo, often, we find our taste for pastry has gone ! So, being foals, we thought it would be perfect only to have to gallop and frisk always about the warm summer fields. But many years of the routine of work having passed over them, sometimes the patient plodding horses, out of harmony with the sunny meadows about which they used to race as colts, upon being in old age turned loose into them, have petitioned even to be taken back to the mill again, and to surrender that perplexing wealth of time upon their hands. How touchingly and charmingly Charles Lamb paints the picture which I have etched, in his

"Superannuated Man." Too busy through life to have holidays, and out of gear for them when they come, "not single spies but in battalions:"—does not this seem strange and sad?

"Our hearts are dough, our heels are lead,
Our topmost joys fall dull and dead,
Like balls with no rebound!
And often with a faded eye
We look behind, and send a sigh
Towards that merry ground!"

But however just now we are, in my pleasant reminiscent thought, rattling down the High. It is a lovely day; the yellow-grey of St. Mary's spire, the dark mass of University, the full elms of Magdalene College, and the tall pensive Tower that sometimes thinks aloud in the most mellifluous of bell-language: these are left behind, and soon the snowy tents appear on the field, and the spots of white and of colour that are cricketing there already. And our hearts are gay and blythe, and we are in tune for the day and the game.

"Meanwhile the bees are chanting a low hymn;
And lost to sight th' ecstatic lark above
Sings, like a soul beatified, of love."

A sweet, joyous summer day; one of those days to be enjoyed heartily while it is present, and to be pleasantly remembered when it is of the past. And behold, for once I have quitted my seat on the benches, and am found clad in harness and somewhat flurried, as I find myself traversing the space of green sward that lies between the tent and the wicket, bat in hand, leg encased in whalebone and padding, indian-rubber centipedes making my fingers grotesque. I hope I shall escape a duck's egg, at any rate, for I have a strong aversion to looking foolish; but, against my judgment, they *would* have me join in this day's game, or college match. Behold me, however, at the

wicket. Guard is given, the field grows painfully attentive, the bowler retires, poises, and advancing, delivers the swift flying ball; unscathed it passes me; but no crack of stumps is heard. A reprieve. Again, and this time cautious treatment of the ball lays the patient dead at my feet. Another reprieve. Perhaps I may survive until I get my eye in. But again: and seeing this ball well to the off, and in his hurry, quite forgetting to think about my bails, I become courageous, and succeed actually in persuading him to post off and fetch me three runs from a far corner of the field, Over! I am then to face the other bowler. This is hard, he probably has his own special tiresome peculiarities; and I was getting, I fancied, a little at home with the first. The sort of quadrille, that the changing over appears to the ignorant, had ended: again the field grew rigid. What a pace! Well, happily he wasn't straight. Nor the next, and here now comes the third right at my leg. Courtesy dictates the quick step aside, and a sanguine temperament suggests the wild sweep of the bat which follows or accompanies the movement. Hurrah! that caught him, and just threw him out of the line of the expectant longstop, and with only that slight pat of encouragement he ran so far that my score was increased to seven. A comfortable little sum to retire upon, at least insuring competency and respectability; still I should keenly enjoy a double number. Yes, and here comes, surely, a half volley; I step forward, flushed with success.

"Yea, let me make my dream
All that I would!"

I "let out" at the missile: I catch it well in full career: I already see the seven a ten, when oh!—but let me draw a veil over the painful end. Was it of malice prepense that the bowler gave me that ball? Did he

foreknow that I should so smite it? a cold-hearted monster! I could have wished it red hot, as it sweetly sailed into the welcoming hands of long-field-off, who, of course, had neither the delicacy nor the courtesy to miss it. So I retired upon my small income, not disgraced, if not glorious.—Happily, I instinctively felt, for my respectability, we had not time for another innings.

Well, I enjoyed the day, and if I have enlarged upon my experience, my excuse is that it is indeed a contrast to that which would most commonly be set before the public. And there are many, like myself, fond of Cricket, but no Cricketers, who will in me hail a brother, and half pensively, half smilingly, recognise upon this page their own experiences, anxieties, sweet moments, and despairs. I rather pride myself on the word with which I label the feeling of the much-doubting batsman as he finds himself still in possession after the passing of each ball. It is to him a series of *reprieves*: now an unlooked-for gleam of success: a dawn of hope and confidence: a moment's pang: and then he is sitting in front of the tent in a tender glow or gloom.

The class of unsuccessful aspirants is, in all departments of merit, a large class, and, I think, a class deserving perhaps more sympathy and kindly consideration than it gets. The baffled lover; the would-be Author; the muff at Cricket:—

“There have been vast displays of critic wit
O'er those who vainly flutter feeble wings,
Nor rise an inch 'bove ground.”

Yet truly there is real pain in the mortification and sense of defeat which follow upon unsuccessful effort that was earnest and conscientious and sincere, in any race of which fame was the crown. A leafy crown, a crown that fadeth away, but a passionately sought prize to the young heart, that knows that success is

noble, but has yet to learn that greatness may be wrought out of well-employed failure. Hear one of the young fellows—

“O Fame! Fame! Fame! next grandest word to God!
I seek the look of Fame! Poor fool!—so tries
Some lonely wanderer 'mong the desert sands
By shouts to gain the notice of the Sphinx,
Staring right on with calm eternal eyes.”

That may be a little exuberant ; but don't oppose to it, you elder men with practical heads, a coarse, shoppy vulgarity. Don't you know that God has so ordered His world that the singing comes before the nest-building?

But all this may sound too serious treatment for mere cricket failure. Well, I don't know : there is a certain fame and glory in Cricket ; and he wins for the time a place in the Pantheon who has, off his own bat, pulled the match out of the fire, and finds himself carried round the ground in triumph by a crowd of frantic devotees. I knew, at any rate, a man at Oxford who certainly gave up his First class in Moderations, and fell into the second rank, from being unable to withstand the lure of probably becoming bowler of the University Eleven. This involved the surrender of the few important finishing days of reading, to the preliminary matches and trials : and the hero at Lord's, before whose cunning balls fell many a Cambridge wicket, found, when the Class-list appeared, that he had indeed paid for one distinction by loss in another. I wonder whether he regrets his choice.—So much, however, for the love of honours in the cricket-field.

But I promised, let me remember, to walk with you to Lord's ground, to see the great Oxford and Cambridge match there. I cannot describe this year's ; it may be, future as you read the page, I shall turn

back the leaves of the past until I come to one specially marked annal in my remembrances of Cricket.

Happening to be staying, together with my wife, near London, just at the time of the match, I determined that we would make two days' holiday of it, and that she should go with me to see the contest and all its gay accompaniments. For a country parson and his wife, these little affairs which to you Londoners are such matter-of-course things—these little treats which break the usual routine of the quiet life, are important epochs. We have this advantage, among others, over you, however, that we enjoy small things as though they were large, and large things twice as much as you can do. And this expedition was, of course, one of the *great* treats. How delightful in the first place, of itself almost worth the journey, must be conceded to be the travelling, and going through London with your wife, *free from encumbrance of luggage!* What country parson will not enter into this felicitation? for seldom do we go for light excursions; generally it is a heavy concern, a "move" in miniature; children and nurse, and trunks and bags, and hampers and portmanteaus—a chapter of anxieties and of petty warfare with cabmen and railway porters, who won't attend to *you* when you want them, there being just, and only just time to catch the other train, and so avoid a two hours' waiting, with tired wife and children, at the dull station.

Besides this enjoyment, we had that of a fine day, which, again, is of itself almost enough to make any outing successful. There is also a great and special pleasure in being in London, or passing through it, outside an omnibus or in a Hansom cab, on a fine day. The country, of course, is to be chosen for a permanency; but yet undoubtedly the town has its colour, its lights

and shadows, its composition, its nameless unticketed charms, even then when the sun is shining on a June day, and Londoners are sighing for the country. But, having the country always, we denizens of it think such a day not wasted in town, and glean many beauties as we pass through the streets and squares. Nor only on such days : nor only, for that matter, in day itself. Here is a bit that I saved, and thought worth saving, out of a country newspaper. It gives the beauty of the city at night :—

“I love to see the quiet dignity
With which, when work is done and night draws on,
And all the din of footsteps dies away,
It shakes from off its flanks the ebbing tide
Of busy life, slips off the glare of day,
Wraps round its walls the mantle of the Past,
And settles back to its historic calm,
As if no break divided its long rest.”

We enjoyed, in brief, the very journey, which, however, ended duly, and, entering the ground, we soon found ourselves denizens of the only two seats (as it would almost appear) that were unoccupied. A new scene to my wife! The immense living hoop, “like a (double) rainbow fallen,” the colour, and the movement, and the numbers that every moment swelled.

But soon after we arrived the men began to prepare for commencing the game ; and we eagerly scanned the lithe, often stalwart and graceful forms that wore the dark or light blue cap. Cambridgè was, I believe, expected to win ; and we looked askance at the ranks of the foe. Of course we had bought a card with the names, and my wife prepared herself to score, but we knew not the men by sight, hardly by reputation, so quite out of the cricketing world had we been for long. Soon, however, I gathered, piecemeal and here and there, intelligence concerning the prowess of this or that champion ; and of one or two I

already knew the fame. The Captain of the Oxford Eleven, for instance, had but lately signalized himself by a score, I think, of over 100, in some great match. And now it was pleasant, while the men sauntered about, or leant against the posts of the pavilion, to survey the many faces that passed and repassed about and behind us, and now and again to recognise some familiar Oxford face, often appearing from the strange clerical garb that yet seemed natural somehow,—I suppose from familiarity with one's self in it—although it made a change in the look of those very same men that used to swing with easy stride down towards the boats, or to mount the Drag to Cowley, in all coats, and hats with every coloured ribbon.

But the preliminaries were settled: the toss won: and the first men (Oxford) in. Alas! my wife has vainly sought for the carefully, too carefully, kept card; else might I have borrowed the Homeric strain; have given a list of the chiefs; who first, who last, went to the battle, and how this and that triumphed or fell, not from crashing spears, but from crafty shooters: not from rending crags, but from ripping balls. It may not be: but few of their names even can I remember. Let me essay to give a general idea of the progress of the fight.

The men were placed: guard given: several thousands expecting the first ball. Let me hasten to relieve excitement by stating that, to the best of my recollection, it was a maiden over, and that about the beginning of the match a certain flatness prevailed. It was really quite a long time, I fancy, before the telegraph marked ten; and I employed the opportunity in careful explanations, not then first begun, to my wife.

In vain, perhaps you say: for how can a woman possibly understand cricket? I reply that if she does

not, the fault is in her teacher. At the beginning, you have, I grant, to clear her mind of a hopeless muddle concerning the whole intents and purposes of every man in the field. This is begun, and half ended, by simply impressing and emphasizing this broad fact: that the two batsmen are, throughout the innings, the sole representatives of the one side, and that every other player on the field is occupied in the endeavour to get them out. This understood, the nature and reason of the "Over," another great puzzle, may be well instilled; and the quadrille to which this episode gives rise among the men may be reduced to simplicity, by just explaining how the altered direction of the ball must necessarily alter the places of those who are waiting to stop or catch it, and how those posted at the long distances change posts as well as places to save time and peregrination. This much premised, the ground will be cleared of wilderness, and you may then answer questions, which will soon become intelligent enough, and you can put in your drills of regular information. It is your own fault if there be not soon full enough idea of the great game to permit an intelligent appreciation of it, and close interest in it. Quickness of perception is the last thing in which women are deficient: but the power of weighing opposite considerations judicially and impartially; the power of reasoning logically; the power of following out a thing, with the close patience of a sleuth-hound, to its consequence or to its source—these are her deficiencies, and for these her education—or the want of it, rather than the character of her mind, is accountable. This by the way. *My* pupil, at any rate, was apt; and soon she could, and did, enter most heartily and thoroughly into the meaning and spirit of the game. This was well, for it would have been a huge disaster, had no interest in the play

been aroused in her mind, to have taken her for a whole day's dose of watching it.

By this time two wickets were down, the score continuing sluggish in the extreme. I longed for a little warmer work ; but the bowling was evidently not to be trifled with, and the batsmen played a careful game. Behold, however, another vacancy : and now a lithe, middle-sized man, with the dark-blue cap pressed down above his swart-complexioned face, stepped, bat in hand, from the pavilion. I asked his name. "Maitland." Full of excitement, I announced to my wife the presence of the Captain at the wickets ; and hurriedly again recounted his exploits of late, and promised that at last the spell should be broken, and the fours and fives fly about the field. Eagerly and intently we watched, as the swift ball left the bowler's hand : would it go for six? or would he be content with just a two or three to begin? How utterly blank we looked, as—yes, it was a reality : the stumps behind that redoubtable bat were scattered hither and thither! *He* could afford it, however, but Oxford hardly could, and we felt sorely dashed. The chief sustained his reverse with the same quiet dignity with which he would have carried success. I always admire the bearing of these chieftains as they calmly seek the Pavilion under a hail-storm of clapping, or a sympathetic silence that would be applause if it could. Well did the Captain, let me remark here, retrieve this fall, next day, in the second innings : and much did we exult in his success. Things, however, at present looked ill for the dark-blue colours ; and although a stand was made at the end by the less powerful batsmen, yet I think the Oxford score did not exceed some eighty or ninety. It was evidently all over with them, for there were some tremendous batsmen

on the Cambridge side.—We mournfully discussed some sandwiches and bitter ale between the rival innings.

'Twere long and tedious, even could memory produce sufficient photographs for the purpose, to dwell in detail upon every phase of the match. Enough to tell how our languid interest revived, as the experience of Oxford was repeated in the Cambridge innings. Runs most gradually got: and wicket after wicket crashing down. The interest was fully aroused; quickened into excitement; the match seemed recovering its even balance: and though a stand was presently made, and the career of the fatal ball arrested, yet I think Cambridge did but head Oxford by some twenty runs; and as many as this were obtained by Oxford in her second innings, without the loss of a wicket, before the day's play closed. Thus the two were once more even: for the entire Eleven of Oxford had yet to go in; to begin, as it were, all fresh next day, with twenty runs for a start.

I like to see the fielding in such a match as this. It is nearly the prettiest part of Cricket. The ball so cleanly taken, and instantly and unerringly sent in; the cautious and instinctive backing up; the coolness and self-possession; the neatness, precision, absence of flurry or hurry: all these things are to me a study. Indeed I remember to have laid to heart a useful lesson, upon which I have since acted, from seeing the bearing of a true cricketer upon missing a ball which he should have fielded. The tyro, or the half-bred player, would have lost his self-possession, scrambled and fumbled after the ball, and finished perhaps by kicking it a few yards further on its course, certainly would have made a bad shot or two at capturing it. Not so my friend. He just drew himself up for a moment, and let the ball lie:

then cool, rapid, certain, swooped upon it, and had it in in a twinkling. And I have applied this example in cases dissimilar in circumstances, but alike in kind : cases, I mean, of making a slip or a mistake. Pause for a moment to collect yourself and to avoid flurry, and then act. Thus, even in the case of public reading, how sometimes you will find a slip or a fault followed by a stammering and confusion, a fumbling after the ball, much more disturbing and painful to audience and reader or preacher, than the calm dignified recollection, and then the quiet rectification of the error.—A curious mode, you may say, of studying elocution. But there are analogies in most things to a mind which has a turn for discovering them.

To end, however, the story of our match. My wife was not only ready, but eager, to visit Lord's next day ; and my Father also accompanied us, to see the end. When we arrived Oxford was not only in, but, in considerable degree *out*; and things were looking anything but well for our chances. Still, Maitland's fine innings cheered us a bit, the more because of our jealousy for his reputation, in which all Oxford men seemed part proprietors. Something like one hundred the innings closed for, not enough by some decades at least. And the Cambridge score crept up, not brilliantly, but quietly ; even to the last the interest continued ; for, if I remember right, there were yet ten to get with the last man in but one ; and before this was obtained, the last man was facing the bowler. The excitement was intense as the ball sped on its voyage of discovery, and the cheers rang out when a clean and gallant cut secured the match for Cambridge.

“Alas ! that Oxford man should sing
The combat where her colours fell:
That Oxford bard should wake the string,
The triumph of her foes to tell!”

Yet so it was : and I can't help it ; nor am I sure that if I could I would. At the time, of course, one's sympathies are strongly enlisted, but when it is over, so long as it was a good fight, and the Universities have in the whole list of matches kept fairly even, we do not in the least grudge the victors their well-earned triumph.

So, well pleased, we returned home, and retained a pleasant memory of the eager play, the blue canopy (that *would* wear Cambridge colours) doming it all ; the smooth green sward ; the great circling crowd ; many sweet girl-faces, whether with the dark or the light-blue garb ; some faces dear through old friendship, and pleasant to be seen again ; and last, some faces of other chieftains besides those of Cricket ; chieftains in Art, in Literature, &c., who had been pointed out to us, and who are certain to be seen there on that great day when Oxford meets Cambridge on the tented field.





NO. IX.

AN AUTUMN WALK.

IF dull Care, which sits behind the horseman (as most people have heard at least once in their lives), can be eluded, and if the heart be light, and the step springy, and the brow clear, and the internal machinery well oiled; and life, just then, a glad thing and enjoyed both by mind and body—under these propitious circumstances there is hardly any recreation to be placed above a good walk, hardly any poppy which I would rather gather out of the long rows of busy days. In company; thus it is delightful: alone; thus it has also its delights. *Alone*, however, I repeat, it must be:—if that weary-faced, brow-seamed companion, of which I spoke just now, be likely to draw near, and take your arm, and, regardless of with-your-leave, or by-your-leave, insist on interspersing every incident, view, object, pause, or progress, with his joy-killing remarks; in such a case the very last thing which I would recommend for your recreation would be a walk alone (so-called) through scenery however charming.

“One morn I put my heart to sleep,
And to the lanes I took my way.”

Ah, but how useless was this make-believe; how vain to slip, however stealthily, out of the back door into the sunshine, leaving Care, dull Care asleep (you thought), in the house. You have hardly gone a hundred yards before (with that odious

matter-of-course familiarity) his arm is locked within your own, and you are deep in busy, anxious conversation with him. You come to a stone set all over with vivid dwarf moss, and tiny turquoise forget-me-not. By an instinct you pause to admire and love it ; but lo ! you are far from it soon in an abstraction, even while you bend over it, for your ill companion is busy plying you with anxious considerations *as to how that pile of bills at home may be diminished, and a fresh, free start made on a better plan.* Or you are leaning on a fence, looking through trees at the gleam of a wide shallow river ; the cool that comes from it always is delicious to your heated brow. The crisp brattle of the ever-rushing waters brings lulling and refreshment to your brain. It is but for a moment ; straightway the plashing murmur has passed from your regard, the grey, leaden gleam among the alders, even though you are still looking at it, is not perceived any longer ; the eyes are fixed, but the brain has been called off. "*Ah !*" that malicious comrade has whispered, "*How lonely your life will be now all hope of winning her is gone !*" And the picture that you drew a veil over, and thought to forget for at least a while in your walk through the summer meadows ; the picture of that face whose very sweetness is your inexpressible sadness, is, in a moment, with cruel distinctness, held before your thought.

"Thus did she look on such a day,
And such the fashion of her hair ;
And thus she stood, when, stooping low,
You took the bramble from her dress,
And thus she laughed and talked whose 'No'
Was sweeter than another's 'Yes.'"

No wonder that the cool murmur and the cool gleam faded quite from your mind, and that your

brow sets, and your head is bent, and your eyes moodily fixed on the road, as you turn with a sigh to pursue your unrefreshing walk with your inexorable and unshakeoffable companion. You should not have done it, you know ; the very last thing that you should have devised by way of recreation and diversion of thought was this walking tour, to appearance alone, but in reality with this kill-joy comrade! "*Laid your heart to sleep,*" had you? Nay, 'tis too light a sleeper, and however you stole away on tiptoe, there it is, after the first few minutes, standing up in the crib, and that wearying perpetual wail has begun afresh.

"While thus I went to gladness fain,
I had but walked a mile or twain,
Before my heart woke up again,
As dreaming she had slept too late;
The morning freshness that she viewed
With her own meaning she endured,
And touched with her solicitude
The natures she did meditate.

No ; the solitary walk is but a slow and refined torture under circumstances like these. If troubled with a mental toothache, and desirous of a lull, you must take some other pursuit as your prescription for this. Gardening or carpentering ; these are both admirable for quite absorbing the mind until Care's ever-tolling bell at first becomes muffled and presently is unheard. At least this is true of minor worries, and matters which are more anxieties than sorrows ; making a bee-house or altering a garden-bed won't make you forget for even a while that you have buried your bonny boy, or your life's hope, or that you have committed a murder. But the process is an admirable one for taking your mind clean away from the depressing routine of the office in which you have to sit all the long spring and summer

days ; or from the harass of the many nameless but (to all) familiar minor anxieties and worries ;—crumbs in the mind's bed ;—or from the contention of philosophy, history, mathematics, &c. in the brain if you be an intending double-class man.

Yes, avoid the lonely, even though lovely, walk, if you cannot really be alone ; as you would avoid the roasting yourself at a slow fire. If, however, things are so with you that you can for certain fair broad days count reasonably (amid the changes and chances that yet must always peril it) upon the gay, blythe boy-heart again,—there is, I repeat, nothing in the way of recreation more intensely, exquisitely enjoyable to the man with an eye for seeing, a mind for appreciating, and a heart for loving, than a leisure walk through fair scenery.

Let me recall such a walk, one link in that pleasant chain yclept a walking tour. Half of the chain welded with that of a dear companion ; half fashioned in solitude. Care, dull Care ; ah, I had eluded thee for the nonce ! I had gone away, and left thee no address ; the wrinkles were ironed out of my brow ; the song of younger days welled up spontaneously now and then. I need hardly say that one would not desire always, nor very often, to be without some regular manful employment ; but it is, as I have said or sung before in these idle papers, an exhilarating feeling to have sometimes, the feeling that for a few weeks you have *nothing to do*. That you have come to a gap in a life of incessant occupation, if not of hard work ; a blank space in the close-written pages. Nothing to do but to please and amuse yourself.

I really think that of all people who can enter the most fully into the relief and delight of such an occasional surprise the parish priest is the one. However

he loves his labour, it is a thing *always with him*, and its influence must necessarily have a strong depressing element, from the fact which is obvious—that so much of it must be, or must appear to be, labour in vain. Then his whole life (if he be a faithful servant) is, more or less, one of self-denial: he has not, as the business man has, any time certainly to call his own; much of his work lies in the evening, when others are entitled to rest; and Sunday brings few vacant hours to him. He is not his own master, nor expects, nor wishes to be; he is pre-eminently a servant. A servant first of that Master the least ray of Whose helping and approving love brightens his heart really more than all the glad sunshine of any world's joy could do: and he is also the servant of every one, the greatest and least, the oldest and youngest, in the parish. He has a concern in the concerns of every man, woman, and child in it. They are his family, under his care; and what with his consciousness of his own inadequacy and shortcomings, and what with his anxiety for them, and continual apparent failure in his work for them, you will allow that, though peace underlie it, there is yet much care in his lot. The business man achieves so much day by day; the work is done, and successfully done, so far as it goes. But suppose the case of his having to keep accounts, very few of which would have any reasonable likelihood of being correct, and to do work a great deal of which was next to certain to end in failure: to number that which next time would be found wanting; to make straight that which a week after would in all probability have started aside into crookedness again: and then grant that there would be wear and tear in such work.

With this preparation you will be able to enter sympathetically into my elasticity of spirits, and light springiness of foot, as, on a warm autumn morning;

breakfast over ; the long day before me ; I sally forth from my cozy little lodgings just under Tintern Abbey, for a walk (a first visit) to the Wyndcliff, and to Chepstow Castle. Sweet Tintern ! I will not speak of thee in an episode, I, thy lover, am purposed to pen one day a whole paper in thy praise. I pass thee lingeringly, lovingly, reverently ; as I turn my back on thee and wend my way by the upper road, old and impracticable for wheels, towards the Wyndcliff, often I face back to regard thee, changing in aspect as I follow the path and ascend the hill. At last thou art far below me, grey with thy green larch against the coloured hillside ; a few steps more—walking backward—and I have lost thee. Then I am able to go on merrily, with undistracted mind, towards the grandeur and beauty which I am delightfully anticipating.

Certainly a lovely bit of old unused road. Through the hedge I spy the dry bed of a mountain streamlet, the banks moss-covered, plumes of fern drooping from the green stones. How quiet a fairy valley, far from the dust and drought, green, doubtless, all the year, under the roof of clematis, honeysuckle, and wild rose, shut in by nut and maple. I dare say the squirrel races across it, and bead-eyed mice flit, rather than move, about it ; and once a year the returned chifchaff gives the word for the wild hyacinths to ripen into blue : and the silver laugh of the willow-wren peals above it, sprinkling the leaves with that light rain of sound ; and, for ruder noises, there is the harsh note of the jay and the scolding of the blackbird if any obnoxious intruder should move his ire. And soft winds sigh through it ; and there is the patter and rustle and rush of showers above it ; and in the still autumn days, the hush only broken by the slight excitement of a brown nut, making its way through the yellowing leaves. What a secluded miniature dell ! No wonder the tall or drooping plumes of ferns

keep so lush and green, and last on through the Winter which levels the hollow as with a smooth white sward of snow. Or sometimes, after a thaw or long rains, a twisting cataract rushes down it, whirling away the sodden leaves which thought to have rested there in that long fosse for ever in peace. Then the leafless hedges are lit with the scarlet hips and deeper haws, and some branches are dressed with clustered wealth of blue-purple sloes.

I leave this tiny glade with some regret, remembering, however, as I press gaily on, that, after all, it is but the first course of the day's feast. And now I have attained to a considerable height, and looking back, can descry some distant black, stern-looking ranges of Welsh hills appearing above their wood-clad kin that shut me round when I was beneath in the valley.

A quiet stretch of cultivated table-land ; a farm at which I ask my way,—and now I am close to the moment which, for this famous view, will change anticipation into memory. According to my directions I should be just above the point ; approaching it by the upper road, I shall drop down upon it, and get the panorama suddenly complete, not having forestalled it by dribblets in ascending. I pause for a moment : there is always with me, a reluctance to turn a keen future enjoyment into a however delightful past experience.* I have this feeling especially with a new poem of Tennyson's. Still no doubt a possession is more valuable than a hope. Let me descend and secure this.

* * * * *

And this is the view from the Wyndcliff. How long have I stood here, absorbed, still, wrapt in speechless

* Compare "Yarrow Unvisited."

admiration and deep content? A grand and lovely view indeed. A double-tier balcony of stone ended my descent through the trees; this was, sure enough, the point for which I was to make, and on this I am sitting. A bad head is mine for looking down steep places, and I lean forward very gingerly to look over the parapet. A sheer and lofty cliff standing out of the wood which lies at its feet, and thence stretches down, a marvel of colours, hues, tints, to a green strip of pasture meadows, and the winding Wye. How one straightway thinks of the feeling of toppling over, losing the clutching hold, and then down, down, and the crash into the sea of trees below. Worse than that fall of the stolid youth from the top of a fourteen-storied house at Edinburgh, of whom it is related that his grave meditations resolved themselves into outspoken comments on his way down. A gentleman standing in a balcony about half-way up the house heard the solemn and profound remark as he sped by, "*Hech! what a clite I'll get!*" But I recover my steadiness of head a little. How lovely, this looking down on the foliage; masses of all colour and hue, orange and red, and purple and sienna, and yellow and green, studded with very many dark yew-trees, distinct from and enhancing the delicate, frail decay-colours. But even *these* had arrayed themselves with a very illumination of rose-berries. I never saw them in such fruit, dressed as with tiny, innumerable, fairy-lamps stringing all the branches. And below and beyond all this beauty, a sort of amphitheatre shutting in green fields smooth and vivid as lawns; dotted here and there with the red white-faced Hereford cattle. The Wye winding wonderfully through these meadows, and under wooded hills, that are crowned by terraced, tree-crested cliffs, standing out of clasping woods. Stern and hard they look, the bare and

rugged cliffs, with the woman-wood clasping their knees—

“He added not, and from her turned: but Eve,
Not so repulsed, with tears that ceased not flowing,
And tresses all disordered, at his feet
Fell humble; and embracing them, besought
His peace, and thus proceeded in her plaint:
‘Forsake me not thus, Adam! witness Heaven
What love sincere and reverence in my heart
I bare thee, and unweeting have offended,
Unhappily deceived! Thy suppliant
I beg, and clasp thy knees!’”

Thus fancifully might we parallel the lowly tree-grace, and the lofty cliff-sternness, and easily find human analogies in the unconscious pathos of nature.

But my trouble, the bitter ingredient in my cup of enjoyment, is the river, this winding Wye. Do I not remember it clear and full, and deep and grand, flowing past the woods, and brimming up to the meadows, of fair Herefordshire; the silver Wye, the abundant Wye? And now what do I see? Deep muddy banks, and a shrunken stream flowing low down between them. Is this my darling river? How can I understand the change? I seem to have lost an old friend. I suppose the long drought of this year accounts for the meagre waters, now that the tide is out, and thus leaves the river

“Vocal in its wooded walls,”

and I must wait for full enjoyment until

“The salt sea-water passes by,
And hushes half the babbling Wye,
And makes a silence in the hills.”

And lo! already it is setting back again; the seaweed is drifting fast inland: the channel is rapidly filling, the mud banks sinking lower; and I seem to have watched but a little time, before, if not my silver Wye, at least my full Wye, has taken away my

one regret and disappointment. And far over the coloured woods, and rugged cliffs, the yellow sea has returned and covered the mud banks of the Firth. And the sun has hammered a broad plate of the water into wrinkled, dented, beaten brass.

In looking at a landscape like this, you first admire it, and are content for a long while to admire it, as a whole. Then you begin to pick out, and to appreciate, and to dwell upon and gloat over, the details. How delicious in colour, that long rugged rampart of Bannager crag, quite bare, except just at the very summit, as though scathed by some wide lightning sheet. The grey limestone, out of the thousand coloured hues, besides being singularly beautiful, gives repose to the eye. One part had been lately quarried, and the stone there was warm-tinted ; time had not yet toned and hallowed it into that cathedral-grey. My eyes dwell for a long time upon this grand titanic wall, passing thence again to the river, full now, and after its wonderful curves which make almost an island of part of the valley, disappearing behind a bold-outlined hill, tree-clad, rock-varied. Beyond, it again appears, leaving Chepstow behind, the chapel of whose castle can well be seen from where I stand, and the smoke of the town behind the hill. Here it joins the Severn, whose distant gleam behind the rocky rampart I had before detected. Then stretches the wide Firth of this river opening into the Bristol Channel. And, furthest, spreads the sunlight, burling the sea.

But while I lingered, I heard a bustling noise in the oak above my head, and lo, a squirrel, busy and blithe ! These little creatures in their free state have a vast charm for me ; for one reason, I have not often been where they are abundant. And I can fancy the delight of the Londoner, accustomed to see them

only in the Pantheon bird-room (alas, only a memory now!)—or in the Regent's Park Gardens (soon, there is a mournful whisper, to become the same!)—or on a vendor's hand in the streets; I can fancy, I say, the delight at the novelty of seeing the little creatures, free and happy and with no price on their heads, running with their length of tail across the path, or up the tree-trunk; sitting on their haunches, the train having become a standard, eating, or watching with bead-like eyes, while they clean their whiskered face; anon, affrighted or playful, dashing, nay, rather, it seems, lightly flying—from bough to bough, or from tree to tree, agile, bird-like, but yet giving us a change from birds:—for tree-animals are few with us. All this is a delight, even where it is not also a wonder. And, for my part, I love to keep a breathless quiet, and watch the movements and conduct of creatures that, under such circumstances, gradually cease to be suspicious, and presently become at their ease. Thus, time and again, I have watched for a long while with much satisfaction, water-rat, shrew-mouse, ring-ouzel, squirrel. On this occasion, however, my friend before long disappeared into a retreat in an ivy-headed tree; and so I went on with my landscape. Again he made his appearance, but almost directly re-entered his retirement. Here I acted in a way which will hardly bear relating, interfering with the harmony of the spirit of the woods; I bombarded the ivy castle with rotten sticks and pebbles,—not with purpose to harm, I need not say, but intending to scare him out. For a time he gallantly stood the siege; then, on a sudden, the sally-port was thrown open, there was a rush, and a bound, and a little long red flash, that leapt from tree to tree. A guilty feeling came over me to have disturbed his confidence.

A trifling incident. But somehow I fancy that it

may have its passing interest not only for me, who remember it, but for others condemned to pass much of the fair year where there are no free squirrels, in the hard work of London offices, or London society. The poppy-petals are, in truth, fragile ; yet you pluck the flower lightly without stopping, as you pass the crowded bank, and for this moment you find pleasure in the wrinkled scarlet, and glossy black, even if you throw it away and forget it the next. And if it gave a moment's pleasure let us imagine the gentle, humble-hearted, if gaily-attired, thing, content ; conscious that it has not lived and died in vain.

It is time, however, that I descend the hill, and get into the road to Chepstow, whose town, especially whose castle, is included in my bill of fare for the day.

And now I have a renewed enjoyment of the view. True, it lessens, and narrows ; soon I lose the wide waters of the Firth and the Bristol Channel : and the great amphitheatre of the hills shuts in the prospect, with no suggested distance beyond. Still, I get my Panorama cut up into Pictures ; and these framed by the trees under which I am walking, and through which I catch glimpses of the glories beyond. When I stood in my balcony, the view was all background ; now there is foreground, tree-foreground, too. And under my feet, not a deep abyss ending in a billowy ocean of foliage, but firm forest-paths, gracefully littered with the wealth of the woodlands : bronze leaves lined with frosted silver : thin patines of tarnished gold, eaten all over into holes : brown leaves, and leaves of faded crimson, and crisp rolls of dull buff or maroon. And I descend, and I descend, and still I pause face to face with a new treat.

Oh it is a great, an inestimable boon to be gifted, at least in some degree, with this capacity for appre-

ciative enjoyment ; to find gleanings everywhere, and harvests on special occasions ! You may see, you have seen, tourists "*doing*" a place like this ; "*doing*" Dovedale ; "*doing*" Tintern ; "*doing*" the Alps, or Niagara ; all just as a matter of business or as the necessary preliminary to the acme and great delight of the day and the expedition—viz., the inevitable and heavy feeding to which it leads. The appetite which the change of scene and air, and the unwonted exercise, give ; this, believe me, is often, for your London tourist, the true delight of his tour. A party of these sight-seers, (name-carvers ;) we met in Dove-dale ; hollaing and larking ; my brother waxed indignant ; would have turned them out, had he been autocratic ; I reasoned with him on the live-and-let-live principle. "You have your refined, let them have their vulgar enjoyment ; each *is* enjoying himself, though in a different mode." He grumbled in reply ; but I am bound to say that I also was staggered when, having wandered further up the dale, and meeting a youthful tourist (one of Leech's own), we asked him how much farther we could go, and whether we could get to Thor's Cavern. He directed us, but assured us feelingly, that we should not find a "Pub" all the way. A "Pub" in Dovedale ! The very trout might have leapt from the stream in disgust.

However, I am not now in Dovedale, but on the lower road, on my way, at last, to Chepstow. Here I was flanked with rich wood on either hand, and could more closely wonder at the crimson-strung yews. I leant for a time on a low wall by the road-side ; a mass of autumn-stricken foliage yet under me. Never tired was I of contrasting that rich dark-green of the studding yews with the lighter variety that embedded them ; nor of looking from scarlet to orange, and

thence to the frail wan green that had gone back to look (in vain) for the fresh and vivid spring tint, after the heavy summer sameness ; thence to a glare of yellow ; and so further on to a bewildering mosaic of colour and tint, until pulled up short and righted by the emphasis of one of my red-fruited, black-green friends. There was here also a lovely lower view of the Wyndcliff scene ; a cabinet picture, in contrast with that wide panorama. How grand the abrupt and inexorable walling-in of the rampart above the Wye-valley ; the grey range of terraced limestone standing out of the colour, crowned with a grave green ; the muffled sky (for it had clouded over) in a changed but beautiful harmony.

On, however, on ; for there was much to be done. And so the stately Wyndcliff and its clasping woods were left behind, and I found me before long in a straight dull road, which ran on, with little variety, for a mile or two.

* * * * *

Chepstow Castle. A grand Ruin, with its round grey towers, and walls built on a perpendicular cliff that rises sheer and sudden from the bank of the Wye ; being the bulwark, indeed, that checked the wanderings of the erratic river. A grand old ruin, grandly placed, fixed and stolid beside the swift gliding water ; seeming to grow out of the solid rock ; as old, we might believe, and apparently as enduring as that. Naturally one looks at these proud but fallen relics of an ancient time with a certain degree of compassionate sentiment. They have outlived the days of their glory and their might ; we might think of Keats's dethroned Titans as we contemplate their fallen grandeur and despised strength. How strong they were, how almost impregnable in the old times ;

and now a few rounds of our modern artillery would shake their huge towers and heavy walls into a heap of shapeless ruins.

Yet (however we feel inclined to insult them with our bemoaning) they ask not our compassion, they accept it not. Sternly and grimly they frown at the frivolities and lightnesses about them, never, for any blandishments, condescending to relax their severity. The sunlight at evening rests upon them, and lights their summits and makes broad shadows behind the rounded towers. But the warm light only brings out more distinctly the roughness and scars, the dents and ravages that tell of sieges and of many wearing years. Gaunt, scarred, veterans, they know not how to smile. The graceful ivy crowns their turrets with victor's garlands; they do but suffer apathetically that she work her will: she carefully hides the deep dents and the ruined breaches, and kindly and tenderly clothes the weatherbeaten sides; but that ungracious abstraction till remains as before.

Spring comes, feeling kindly to all, and adorns the grey ruins with a thousand touches of loveliness and grace; but her blackthorn spray, or her unrolling ferns, or the delicate and tender green that lovelily decks the mountain ash, or the beech, or fragile birch, that somehow have found a hold half way up those grim battlements; these fantasies and conceits find no response at all. Then glowing Summer tries her hand, but the warrior Ruin yields no wit to her caresses. Still it stares impassible and unsoftened out of the wild rose-mass that scarfs the battlements, or the honeysuckle-wreaths, and white bindweed, and red sweetbriar clusters, or the bristling deep-blue bugloss, or the tall scarlet snapdragon with its brimstone mouths, or the pink valerian that leans over from giddy heights above depths where the prisoners

used to moan ; or the sweet-breathed wallflower that clings to the sheer perpendicular walls. Bees murmur in the faint-scented flowering ivy ; butterflies "show and shut" their "splendid wings" upon the grey warm old stone ; busy jackdaws chatter about the loopholes, doves woo and coo in the full-foliaged trees about the moat whose branches brim up even with the grass-fringed walls ; thrushes sing out clear and glad from the highest bough of the beech ; a hum of busy men, or a laugh of gay idlers rises from the upstart modern houses, built (not like these old buildings) only *to let* and not *to last*. But Summer with her gay life is only by contrast in harmony with this relic of the deathful past ; she prevails nothing to move its cynic stolidity.

Nor is Autumn much more successful, with her decking of scarlet rowanberries, or her burning hips and haws ; even her sympathetic death is too frail and weak to have much in common with this unyielding, everlasting decay. Winter may seem to suit its mood better, when the snow has hidden all vegetable life, and the whole earth lies in a calm serenity of desolation ; and the birds are silent or dead ; and a winding sheet cast, like a scarf, even over the evergreen naked-stemmed pines. Great folds of snow hide the ivy on the ramparts, and smother the withered grass on the towers ; and like silver moss it clings to every ruggedness and broken surface of the grey stone ; and little ledges have their high-piled rim, and every loophole has its white threshold ; and the Ruin in its shroud looks now less ungentle than at any other time.

But how I am rambling on ! What fantasies are these ? I was lost in a reverie as I stood before this grim dead Building ; nor was the thrill of respectful sympathy unnatural perhaps. Certainly it is one not

unshared by others. What more grand than such a Ruin can Milton find for comparison with his fallen Archangel, whose face

“Deep scars of thunder had intrench’d, and care
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows
Of dauntless courage.”

Thus he describes him, essaying, you remember, to address his legions :—

“He above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower ; his form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined.”

Indeed, there is much scope for reverie, standing before a ruin like this. We fancy the ranks of stalwart yeomen, the archers in Lincoln green, the gallant knights ; we see Rebecca watching from her loop-hole ;—eager Ivanhoe, half risen, leaning on his arm ; we hear the Black Knight thundering at the postern ; there are the massive rocks ready to be hurled on the besiegers’ heads ; here the bright molten lead pours down, part clinging in silver smears to the walls ; here are the clutching fingers still extended, as the ladder is forced backward into the moat. A rude cannon bursts, killing the men that were working it ; there is a trumpet-call ; and, ah ! the foe have mounted the ramparts at another point ; the garrison throng to oppose them ; they close hand to hand upon the wall ; here an attacker and there a defender topples headlong over the rampart, cleft to the brain, thrust to the heart ; the combat deepens, the victory wavers ; the attacking party begins to give ground. Just then, see, at some other point neglected in the struggle a fresh party of assailants have won the heights ; they fall on the garrison in the rear ; the case is desperate now, the castle is taken ; it is but to sell life dearly ; one

by one they fiercely die, but ere the last falls, lo! the castle gates have been opened, and the enemy swarms in.

—Well, I had better go in too; the castle-gate *is* opened,—partly, I suppose, because I rang the bell. I am not ill-pleased that there should be no kindly preparations for greeting my entry with a ladle of boiling lead; such a ceremony might please the Antiquary, but I love not such horrid rain.

A grand ruin! Yes, a grand ruin. Interesting exceedingly, but not, I think, *fascinating*, like Haddon Hall or Tintern Abbey. Here you seem to want conversation, a companion; at the Abbey you would rather be silent and alone.

Not such a companion, however, do you desire, as this, that dryly and unsympathetically ushers you over for base lucre. Glad are we when she has shown us the fine store-room, which we are interested to hear received its supplies from the river; indeed, we find ourselves nearly set musing again on the old past scenes;—when, besides, she has pointed out the buttery hatch, &c., and, giving us a general idea of the plan of the castle, has left us free to meditate in the tower where Jeremy Taylor, Divine and Poet, and Henry Martin, Regicide, were confined.

Three stories of prisons. Let me climb first to the midmost, and contemplate the ledges on which once rested the floor paced for twenty weary years by the feet of the unhappy man whose hand was stained with the blood of his often weak and culpable, yet surely good and noble monarch. Can I pity him? Could I pity the Right Honourable John Bright, or Edmond Beales, the democrats of our day, if—but this is hardly a probable contingency! I fear in such a case pity and sympathy would be difficult whatever were the punishment: but I am

removed far from the contentions of those old troubled times, and I cannot help feeling a prick of compassion and sorrow for that lonely fanatic.

Twenty long years! Even fanaticism would (one might dream) cool down in such a time; and maybe he repented of his deed before he died. Yet his epitaph in a Church near by seems to forbid such a hope, and, indeed, to take the lofty martyr-strain. Well, well, still I cannot keep back sorrow for him. Twenty long years! and only this span for his walking, and just those slits in the wall for his seeing. I dare say he at last wearied of even this lovely view. And never a soul to speak to but his gaoler; no kindly word, no kindly look, no sympathizing pressure of a hand—for twenty years! So to live; the dial of his life stopping, as it were, while of others the hands were moving on: and so twenty years of the world's history worked itself out, while, still living, he was shut away from its events and struggles. The ever moving caravan had passed on, and left him twenty years behind. And then when old age crept over him; when death was now overshadowing him; no face to look at, sorrowful because of him; no hand to grasp when the great loneliness seemed most present to his soul; none to mourn for him, none to regret him: the old friends had died long ago, and for twenty years he had been debarred from the chance of making new.

Or did the stern old Puritan care for none of these things? Had the maggot of self-righteousness eaten out all the kernel of his heart, and left nothing there but dust and dryness? Who can tell? Only this we know, that a creature, once a blithe and laughing child, with the world for his playground; once a lithe youth with a still wider domain of dreamland; was shut up for the last third of his life in this narrow,

round room. And, so thinking, with hushed heart we turn to leave it.

What a contrast is found in the associations which are gathered about the next story! I ascend, and now I am looking at the walls which hemmed in our poet-divine, the sweet and saintly Jeremy Taylor. Are not his writings the very poetry of Theology? his well known "Living and Dying;" his less known, but exquisite "Life of Christ." Around such a theme you may guess how his appreciative and creative thought burst into luxuriant bloom; for even a bare rod would have put out bud and blossom and almonds in the shrine of his heart. And now I seem to see his sweet, grave face, and his broad, calm brow, as he stands half in a muse, half watching the molten orange of the sunset from this loophole: saintly thought and natural beauty being spun in a twisted thread through his meditations. Not long stayed he in this place; and now long long time has passed since he left his prison. However, the abundant pink valerian and fragrant wallflower have marked the place where his footsteps perhaps trod. He goes forth to his Master's work in the world again; this has been, to him, a retreat, rather than an imprisonment: a hermitage rather than a dungeon.

But, oh! this pit, this Dungeon indeed, underneath; below the ground-level, under the damp earth; no sign at all of any window for light. Can we imagine it possible that any poor wretches can ever have been thrust down here? Ah, what horrors may have been enacted and endured in this dark and dismal hole! The growing terror of the everlasting darkness, especially if the heart were ill at ease; the horrible familiarity of toads or worse reptiles; the dread of sleep because of the swarming rats. Ah me! to think that men should be so cruel to men!

To go to your own comfortable bed happy because you had thrust some enemy into such a place ; to pull the sheets up to your chin, gloating over his agony. Well, I can't enter into the feeling at all. I must have had the poor fellow out and have enjoyed the luxury of seeing his surprise at the hot supper and comfortable bed which should have been provided for him ; and I should thus have gone to bed a happier man, never regretting my weakness, even though he should have cut my throat by the morning.

It is time that I went on, or good Mrs. Geeves will have to wait over-long with potato and roast fowl anxious to be dished up. I come to the blank and hollow Chapel, with remains of fine chancel arch and windows. I climb, wherever I find this possible, startled by sometimes coming suddenly upon the edge of a parapet with a smashing descent beneath. Along the wall by the Chapel many ferns and the dear little toad-flax have wrought modern and natural carvings, unsurpassed by any of the old. I come back another way, and now, on my return, I more particularly notice that which was pointed out as the fireplace of the soldiers' hall. The wall has gone ; the roof has gone ; but here still remains this blank hollow, of old the centre of attraction to the rough occupants of the room. Here buff coat and jack, here helm and shield, here spear and bill, were cast together ; and the rude, coarse jest, and the volleying laugh, and the words rising higher and higher, were heard. Here the brown ale flowed round ; here, on the fire dogs, the half-trees were laid, and, smitten, sent a sheet of fireworks up the chimney ; but how silent, how desolate, is all now ! "*There's nothing colder than a desolate hearth,*" says one ; and there is truth in the saying, whether it be literal or figurative. "Where be your gibes now ? your songs ? your flashes of mer-

riment?" Extinct ; and the world has rolled on, and altered all the fashions and all the warfare of that day ; and the broken and blank fireplace and the rugged old castle yet remain into these later years.

One more look at the grey building from the bridge over the Wye ; and then, brisk, on the homeward route again. *Homeward* : it was but the home of five days, that cottage under Tintern ; but we call them homes, our resting-places,—shifting tents though they are,—until the Mansions come.

Quickly home : the tract of dull road passed, and then, in the setting sunlight, a new enjoyment. For in going back you have variety even in the same view, and, besides, you will remember that I came by the upper road as far as the Wyndcliff ; and so now there was an unexplored region, an unexperienced loveliness, awaiting me for part of my way. How grand the view of the Wyndcliff itself, from below. Sublime in front of me it rose : majestic, clad up to the summit one way with most vivid colour and darkest yew, but sheer and precipitous on another side. And when I had entered my wooded road again, glad to leave the bare part behind, I paused long to take in a tall Wych elm, gold-yellow against the stern rock of Wyndcliff, springing from the roadside : ethereal, rarely lovely. Also a very golden bushy Lime. Only the next day, when I came by I felt a degree of pain to see how thinned my wych elm had become in the night ; there was a wind, and the leaves snowing down thickly as I passed.

Once more I leant on the low wall ; once more I looked down on beech, birch, oak, wych elm, vying in colour ; and pale-yellow ash, and rich yews ; acres of wood stretching down beneath, spread out below ; wonderful in tint and hue. And yet below there were those soft pasture lands, parted by the winding Wye.

So I passed on, drinking in beauty. Strange roots of beech twisted within the stones; yews clinging hardly to the very edge of cliffs; fluffly hemp agrimony in seed; in the low wall choice tufts of maiden-hair and the small rue-fern. Carefully did I collect roots of these next day, as I walked to the railway station—lamentably did I leave them in an omnibus, and stood in despair in Oxford Street, watching it recede, suddenly aware of my loss, but too far behind to redeem it.

But I passed on. The hills behind Tintern rose clothed with close brushwood, a contrast to the Banagher crags. I had seen these last to singular advantage. The setting sun lit the limestone terrace, and just touched the further rocks. The warm glow on the cold grey was a thing rather to be inhaled than spoken of. But now I had come to where the close and coloured brushwood clothed the hills, and (prosaic as is the simile) almost suggested a Brussels carpet of richest texture. Out of it stood, here and there, sheer bare or ivy-sprinkled cliffs, abrupt and sudden. But in contrast to this colour, wonderfully various and bright, of the copse-clothed vast hill-side, there was one wide tract *all* a dull green. This was a wood of Ash, &c., newly sprung from last year's cutting, and thus keeping its greenness longer. I found a pleasure in looking from this to the coloured hills: accustoming the eye to the sober tone, then enjoying the surprise of suddenly looking back.

When I had got back to my snug little cottage under Tintern I much enjoyed my quiet evening: my chicken and potatoes came not amiss; some cosy reading, some notes of the day; a letter to my wife: then grateful bed.



No. X.

OLD FRIENDS.

GLAD HOURS IN THE GRAVE YEARS: ay, well may the specific title of this paper be ranged under that generic. It is then when the years have grown grave that we are able to speak of "old friends:" hence, perhaps, a certain pensive ring in the words. *Old friends*:—leaves yet left upon the thinning tree, changing, but not changing to us; and ah, loosening their hold, one by one, to join the heap at the foot; the dry heap now of the once juicy, merry dancers of the Spring. "*Old friends*." Yes, or we may call them the chrysanthemums and asters now in one's garden; only that somehow these spring from the very same roots that used to be snowdrops and crocuses, lilac and laburnum, lilies and roses; the beauty and the dearness of our Spring and Summer-life: the same roots, and still flowering,—but sending up autumn flowers. And a quiet Messenger comes once and again, from the Great House, along the paths, and cuts, one by one, the autumnal blooms that are no longer succeeded by others. "*Old friends*." As life goes on, and wanes, we find that we have no income of these; that we have been living on our principal: and we wonder if, of the few coins left us, enough will be found to last out our need till the end. Old friends: ah, well may we class thoughts of them within this handful of bright, short-lived blossoms.

And what more glad time in the grave years than that lit up by the visit of an old friend? Sudden, let it be, or long looked forward to; for each of these occasions will have its special zest and enjoyment. Soon come, and soon gone, we wistfully think, as we stand on the platform after that last wave of the hand out of the departing train. Soon come, the pleasure we had been so delightedly expecting, but over now:

“For pleasures are like poppies spread;
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed.”

And (if your head is beginning to show something of an Oxford mixture) you go meditatively home, a little dully musing as to when again, if ever, you and your old friend shall sit together by the fireside, and call back, in merry pensive talk, “the days that are no more.”

By the fireside: yes; Winter is of all others the time for these dear meetings. Summer for new friends: then you can take them for delightful outings, and give up your time to amusing them:—lay down, indeed, a cellar of pleasant memories, that shall mellow and put by their coarser parts, their crust of over-newness, and ripen into a pleasant beverage for the yet coming years. But all this was done long ago for the old friends; and, moreover, there is, you are well assured, nowadays no vintage like those of the Summers when you and they were young together. So, when they come to see you, you need not seek for new amusements, new delights, new experiences: it pleases better to sit by the fireside and hob-a-nob with the old generous liquor, pouring it out ever afresh from those hoarded bottles of the past, pleased to see the ring of beaded bubbles that lightly crown the brimming memories; glass touching glass, as it were, in the reminiscent talk: bottle after

bottle opened (this wine of which I speak is of a sort that "cheers but not inebriates")—now the old fellows laughing till the tears run down their cheeks, now recalling some old anguish, and speaking softly, pensively, with nevertheless even an enjoyment of the beverage that was rough and austere when new, but that has long ago mellowed and softened. Ah, the Present rarely satisfied, when "the Present" it was; the gleeful anticipation of a pleasure, or the pensive and tender reminiscence of it;—these, be sure, constitute the larger part of our enjoyment. Even sorrows, I say, shared with old friends in times long ago, have, in the after years, a halo about them, a mild light around them, a clearness and a sweetness at which it does not occur to us to wonder, it seems so natural,—as we recall, in these quiet talks later in life, those hours, keen then, but softened now, when we were sad together.

Immediately after the earthquake the landscape was desolate enough, no doubt, and bare; and we shuddered to look at the gaping chasms, the ugly fissures, the rent and naked rocks, the ruined homesteads. But the alleviating years passed on; and now that, brought back by that reminiscent talk, we together stand again amid the desolation mutually witnessed, vividly remembered, what do we see? Oh, the same gaps and clefts and rents are there, no doubt; the same, yes, for ever the same; but yet the same with a difference. Time, compassionate time, has been at work to veil, if it cannot repair, the devastation, the ruin. A million hoary or golden lichens have spread their gilding or their silvering over the gaunt, bleak stone, until its jagged edge and sharp dagger points, which indeed have in some measure crumbled into bluntness, are scarce regarded under the tapestries of grey and orange. And here

again the velvet moss, with its miniature cornfield of slender-stalked, capsuled seedlets; and here again clinging rims, and veins, and tufts, of all tiny ferns; and grand ostrich plumes of the larger kinds just where the bleakness and the blankness most repelled in the new days of the catastrophe: all these have changed the shattered and convulsed landscape into a scene that now is even beautiful. And ferns and lichens fringe the fallen trees also, and ivy has cast a screen over the sunken roof-tree and the scarred walls; and out of the fissures smile up the crowding primroses and the clumps of grey summer-violets; and long weeping fronds droop down from sharp edges into sullen chasms. And you can endure, nay, you even are pleased now, to walk and linger among those spots in the Past, from which you fled long ago with a cry and a shudder.

Thus, then, do old sorrows appear to us, when we revisit them in company with old friends.

"It is an old friend." Is not this phrase potent in kindly defence of many an inanimate thing even, that has become assimilated to us, as it were, and that for long we have been accustomed to count as part of our belongings? So you may get attached to an old garment, and offer this plea on its behalf if it be rudely reviled as green and threadbare; or to an old hat, or pair of boots, or pocket-book, or purse, or walking-stick.

Indeed for this last I claim a special place in this category. An old walking-stick is peculiarly worthy of the regard due to an old friend. I lay him reluctantly by in the corner; his varnish is all worn off, he is rough with dents and abrasions; nay, more than an inch having been worn off him by constant travel, he no longer suits my height. But he is, as it were, an unwritten diary, the faithful comrade of a

year or two of life. He has helped me over many a brook in some pleasant summer walk, he has hooked down for me many a cluster of yellow-brown nuts, or the laden branches of tempting ripe blackberries ; on him I leaned when I scaled the limestone-ridge after a choice fern ; often he has complacently brought down in showers, acorns and beechnuts for my excited little ones. Nay, did he not for one whole night hang suspended in a tree, a sacrifice to his zeal in this good-natured catering ? and when we repaired in force to the rescue next day, was it not my well-aimed stone that brought him down and re-cemented our companionship ? Have we not, besides all these minor experiences in common, have we not been for whole long excursions together, climbed hills, descended declivities, with mutual assistance ; probed fresh-welling springs, carried knapsacks, entered in many ways with sympathetic zest into all the little episodes of the long walking tour, or the brief afternoon's ramble ? Has not his stout form bent, or even given an ominous crack, as I plied him lever-wise to secure some choice root, or some seaside rarity ? And can I forget how gallantly he played about the nose and ears of that infuriate ram which, coming head down at us in a narrow lane, had assuredly bowled over myself and my other companion like skittles had a mere cane or umbrella been our sole defensive weapons ? And does not such a list of claims justify my assertion, that a walking-stick has a special title to the name and the consideration of an old friend ?

And, to ascend a little in the scale, before our return to human specimens of the genus,—how many a one will recognise a true old friend even in some faithful animal that has, it may be, long shared with him life's vicissitudes and pleasures. The dog that you had with you during your life as a Fellow of a

college at Oxford, so familiarized there as to be itself almost considered as one of the Dons ; that came with you moreover, an old friend, into the at first empty, chill, unfamiliar Rectory, and that, among strangers unaccustomed to your ways, seemed an understanding, sympathetic companion, a link also with that different, for-ever vanished, but pleasant and forgotten past life ;—how sorry you are when the eye has grown dim, and the tail languid, and the limbs lazy ;—and when at last the time has come for you to give certain orders, and then go out for a sad walk, knowing that there shall be at your return no bark, subsiding into capering, to greet you ;—the time when the old friend must be laid by.

Though no sportsman myself, I can sympathize with the feelings of a writer from whose musings I cut an extract which pleased me, and which may come in here to conclude this by-play concerning my theme of "old friends :"—

"We shall say 'good-bye' to Juno soon ; who can doubt it ? Put up your face, old girl ; yes, there they are, the grey hairs ; and the eyes are duller, and the film begins to creep over them. Never mind ; you have had several Augusts and many a September ; you have had your ecstasies ; you have known for many a year what it is to come on game—to be nearly sure, quite sure ;—to stand as though in marble in your trance. And we, looking down on that true old head placed between our knees, see a thousand golden stubble-fields with the sun beating on them ; almost smell the turnip which our foot has crushed, the first of all that year ; or sit, fagged at last, on the grey-blue stone amidst the heather, with a fragrance as of honey all round, and a bag of no mean dimensions emptying at our feet. No doubt the days are gone and our old companion will soon follow them,

and we shall soon follow her ; but they were glorious days for all that—days to be thought of and talked about.”

When does that time in life arrive at which we are entitled to speak of “old friends ?” It *seems* to come very soon. If you listen to your son at Harrow, you will find that, however you might feel inclined to deny it him, he will at any rate claim his use of the word. By the way, how you may notice, even in schoolboy talk, the sacredness, the hallowing power of this adjective, “old.” “Old fellow ;” “old boy :” thus they apostrophize those who are, for the hour, their chief and special chums. Now, it is not only because we are creatures of habit, and get into the ways of old friends, and get them into our ways,—it is not only this that gives the explanation of the charm and mellowness which the passing years give to our friendships. It is that a certain process of trial has been undergone on both sides. Your friendship (if you have according to the proverb, summered and wintered it) has been put to the proof—and has stood it. Experiences of joy and grief have cemented it : disagreements and tiffs have proved it ;—and it was of tougher consistency than to burst, like a gay bubble, at the first rough touch. If a cleft opened for a time, there was in both hearts a hunger, a necessity, that brought you inevitably again together. Or if you did hold aloof for a while,—for life, yet the loss, the grief of estrangement, was never overworn or overgrown : no fairest new growth ever concealed that ghastly rent : the friendship was too real for the sorrow to be healed. Alas!—

“Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth ;

And constancy lives in realms above ;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.
And thus it chanced, as I divine,
With Roland and Sir Leoline.
Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother :
They parted—ne'er to meet again !
But never either found another
To free the hollow heart from paining,—
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder ;
A dreary sea now flows between ;—
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Still wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been."

The heart's affection had hardened into rock; it was not that crumbling mould which, after a breach, soon becomes a velvet turf again or a terrace of wild flowers.

"Forsake not an old friend: for the new is not comparable to him.

"A new friend is as new wine, when it is old thou shalt drink it with pleasure."

There have been many treatises on friendship, but in truth there are few upon the subject vying in excellence with that to be gathered out of the book from which this stanza is quoted. When a snowball is rolling, it picks up material from whatever track it takes; and so it often is with those who have to write. One's ordinary everyday reading falls in with the subject, and unsought material comes opportunely to the hand. And so it was with me, reading one day, with this subject planned upon my desk at home, the first Lesson at Morning Prayers, which Lesson happened to be the sixth chapter of the Book of Ecclesiasticus. I could not help thinking how wise and subtle were the receipts given therein for the manu-

facture of old friends, and the detection of the counterfeit of these. As thus :—

- “Be in peace with many ; nevertheless have but one counsellor of a thousand.
- “If thou wouldst get a friend, prove him first, and be not hasty to credit him.
- “For some man is a friend for his own occasion, and will not abide in the day of thy trouble.
- “And there is a friend, who being turned to enmity and strife, will discover thy reproach.
- “Again, some friend is a companion at the table, and will not continue in the day of thy affliction.
- “But in thy prosperity he will be as thyself, and will be bold over thy servants.
- “If thou be brought low, he will be against thee, and will hide himself from thy face.
- “Nothing doth countervail a faithful friend, and his excellency is invaluable.”

Again, what wise rules are given us for the winning and keeping these precious possessions. As thus :—

- “Be good unto thy friend before thou die, and according to thy ability stretch out thy hand and give it to him.
- “Lose thy money for thy brother and thy friend, and let it not rust under a stone to be lost.”

Once more, what sweet and wise advice is this concerning our conduct in the case of misunderstandings with our friend, or even of injuries received from him :—

- “Admonish a friend, it may be he hath not done it ; and if he have done it, that he do it no more.

"Admonish thy friend, it may be he hath not said it ; and if he have, that he speak it not again.

"Admonish a friend, for many times it is a slander, and believe not every tale.

"There is one that slippeth in his speech, *but not from his heart* ; and who is he that hath not offended with his tongue ?"

Here are maxims and precepts concerning friendship which ought to be illuminated in scrolls, and set about the study walls or the boudoir of every man or woman who owns a friend. And from no treatise on friendship should they be left out.

How many a treatise *has* been written on this subject ! How strong and vehement is this feeling in the hearts of some ! Let us take for an instance, one blossom from the loveliest wreath that ever was laid on a friend's grave :—

"For which be they that hold apart
The promise of the golden hours ?
First love, first friendship, *equal powers*,
That marry with the virgin heart."

But now a sadness comes over the poet's mind, thinking that that crown of maturity might be wanting to his friendship ; that his friend lived not long enough to become an "*old friend*."

"Love, then, had hope of richer store :
What end is here to my complaint ?
This haunting whisper makes me faint,
More years had made me love thee more."

But the friend left lonely bethinks himself, and takes heart again. The snows of Death's Winter were alike in hue with the hoar hairs of the Winter of Age. There was no loss.

"But Death returns an answer sweet :
'My sudden frost was sudden gain,
And gave all ripeness to the grain,
It might have drawn from after-heat.'"

But when, (to return whence I set out),—at what point, while friends yet live together, are they entitled to use of each other that adjective which I characterize as of peculiar dearness, and to speak of each other as "*old friends*?" I think it may fairly be allowed to that time of life which comes upon us soon after thirty is left behind. That time of life within the experience, I doubt not, of many of my readers, that time of life when we are not very old, *but old enough to feel that we were once younger*.

Yes, then it is that we find that, as a rule, we have indeed made up our stock of friends: then it is that we feel that now our care must be given not to the manufacture but the preservation of this article. Then it is that we count over our hoards, with something of a miser's gloating and greed, and are well aware that we have reached the time *when losses cannot be replaced*. The old trees may fall, one by one; but the gap they leave must remain now; the slight saplings that stand in their stead will never supply their place in our day. It is too late for new friends to ripen into old friends; so, at least, we feel. The *joyous* days of life are gone, however its peaceful days may have come: and no friends that we may gather about us now can ever be the "*friends of our youth*." The glad experiences have given place to the grave; and what ray can these new-comers reflect upon us from the set sun of that warm and glowing past? There is no rush of old memories, half-exhilarating even the saddest heart, as the familiar step enters the room: there are no old joy-bells instantly set a-ringing again (however it be faintly and from far) by the look, the

voice, the well-remembered ways. These may be friends, true friends, dear friends, valued friends,—but never *old* friends. It is a second marriage;—a sedate tranquillity, a very kindly relation, we may grant; a mutual assistance, a humdrum happiness. But, ah! *not* that old ecstasy, that ever-remembered delirium, that ushered in the first,—the marriage that followed upon first love. This Autumn has its honour and its meed, but it never knew the delicate and gay gladness of a Spring. The fruit may be mature and useful; *but we never remember for it a blossom-time.*

So we look back, as life goes on, very lovingly towards old gleesome experiences and towards the sharers of them. And each period of life had its peculiar cluster of friends; some, it is true, were like unset blossoms; they fell away, and nearly the memory of them is lost. Of this class are the friends of childhood; of boyhood also, as a rule. Yet at times distinct memories of these come vividly, suddenly back: an old name, an old letter, something in our children's simple ways or idle prattles—and lo! the intervening screen of that long, eventful past is rolled aside, and we are children again. Romping in the hay-fields, racing in the lanes, violet-seeking, garden-digging, boat-sailing, doll-house making (according to the sex), tossing cowslip balls; up to our waist in a green ditch; shell-gathering, seaweed spreading; and all with, this week one, that week another familiar and bosom friend. Quarrelling often; forgiving always, and easily appeased; jealous sometimes, huffy, capricious, affectionate, forlorn; little men and women in Childhood's little world. Playing at friendship, with, in our play, a laughable likeness to the "up-grown" reality; demure and wayward, exacting or gracious, tiresome or agreeable; much,

in our small scale, like grown people. Changing our friends faster than Spring changes its flowers. And so the child passes into the boy at school. And now the friendships become more lasting, like that bloom which sets into small pea-sized apricots on your trees, which yet fall off at a touch,—from frost perhaps; from exuberance of growth most often. You smile, as you ask the schoolboy, each fresh half-year, who is his "friend" now? knowing well that the kaleidoscope will likely have had a turn; the same colours but new arrangements. Yet sometimes the half-year may pass into a year; in rare cases the school-friendship remains constant until the boy has ripened into the youth, and then indeed it is apt to be of the lasting order.

Ah! boyhood is the age of confidence, of mysteries, of linked walkings round the playground, mutual arm round mutual neck; of shared "grub," sometimes community of property; of solemn private enlargings upon sisters, and parents, and the general wealth and grandeur of respective homes. The time of mutual holiday visits, when stiff-collared, black-clad, uneasy, preternaturally solemn, the just-arrived "friend" of whom we have talked so much, sits, uncomfortably upright and silent, on the edge of his chair, in the presence of those sisters of whom he has heard so much. Until we, all important, precede him into the garden, and introduce him to that special lop-eared rabbit, and that well-wattled carrier-pigeon, or choice almond-tumbler, of which he had heard once and again at school; and exhibit the new bat, or the bow and arrows which had been our boast. And soon we are at our ease together, and the gay laugh is thawed, and the starch is soon out of the limbs and of the collar, and the shyness has worn off, and we feel a pride of proprietorship, as, in the little evening-con-

clave after we have shown him to his room, our sisters genially laud our wise choice of a friend.

Well, the later school friendships do not unfrequently last, and what a zest such early reminiscences give to the flavour of friendship that has endured and mellowed into age ! Yet assuredly it is very difficult, when we meet as men, to connect the links of our love with those utterly other selves which so long ago were boys together. No ; the boy-friendship has, I imagine, little to do really with that of ripened years ; you will find that you have, in fact, made a fresh and later start ; you have lost or laid by most of the associations, most of the ties, which belonged to your friendship, as boys. You do not often talk of the old school-days, the old school-adventures, to those with whom your friendship has lasted on steadily, or with only a short break, into manhood. The case is different, perhaps, if after many years you meet the friend from whom you parted as a schoolboy. There has been no gradual fading out of the distant into the near days ; you take up your friendship at that very link where it was abruptly severed ; you thus plunge naturally and with zest into that old, old past of School.

But the boy will often have his Idol, rather than his friend ; his Admirable Crichton, his Steerforth, older than he, cleverer than he, fanning by his condescension the first reverent admiration into a fervent love. Have we not all had such heroes for our worship ? It is in the nature of us from the earliest to look higher than ourselves for props to which the abundant and yearning tendrils of our hearts may be fast bound.—Ah, where is my boyhood's hero now ? How honoured I was by his friendship, how flushed by his praise, how deferential to his injunctions, how flattered by his confidences ! Do I not still, for his bright

and handsome sake, prize above most other volumes in my library, the Shakspeare that he gave me, nobly bound, at that time the pride of my shelves? Is it not one of the first to which I would now fly in the case of forked flames menacing that store of treasures? Do I not see him yet, often, before me; the clear blue eye, the noble brow, with the brown hair tossed off it now and then with that remembered turn of the head; the handsome features, the merry laugh? Can I not even now feel his hand, passed lightly through my curls; is not the time easily summoned back, when I introduce him at home, where he is at his ease, naturalized, loved, at once, while I glow with a happy pride at being his friend? Does not my heart swell as he leans his arm upon my shoulder, the while we pace the sinuous garden-walk, and he is deigning to talk to me as an equal! ay, even to make me a confidant in that matter of his love to C. H.? *Unrequited* love!—I can hardly conceive of such a thing; true, *she* is my ideal of female loveliness, as *he* of manly perfection; still, would not even an Empress be honoured, exalted, by his love? O the devotion on one side, answered by sincere affection on the other, of such a friendship as this; by many of us stored among the experiences of our youth. But the years passed by, and where is my old friend now? Alas, a gap of years opened in our society;—and he grew wild, they said, and his gay ways had grown into deep debts at Oxford, and it was thought well for him to make a fresh start over the far seas; and very many years have gone, and I dare say I should hardly know him if we met; and he has never answered my letters—plumb-lines sent out to fathom the deep distance. But it was the same handsome face when last I saw him, and I have in my library his Shakspeare, and in my drawer his few letters, and in my heart until I

die the dear and faithful remembrance of my loved old friend. Ah, what opportunities, let me say, for good or evil influence on the part of the elder friend, lie in such compacts between worship and sincere affection. Use your power mercifully, wisely, purely, holily, I would say to such a one. For it is almost boundless.

But now we have arrived at that grand epoch of life when we could call our friends by the name of college friends! Ay, here we come to the true nursery of the trees under whose pleasant spreading shade our mature life may afterwards dwell. For this is equal friendship—friendship also that begins at an age near enough to manhood for it to link on, unaltered in kind, though increasing in degree, into our mellowing years. Also this is the material out of which brothers-in-law are fashioned. And oh, what friendships can compare with these, for delicious memories, memories culled and stored from the blithest, sweetest, least care-harassed years of brief life? The new dignity of proprietorship in “rooms” of our own; the new importance of acting the host, and calling into our little castle those whomsoever it pleased us to ask; the cosy evenings by the fire; reading together, or warm in debate, or merry in a select circle; the walks by the Cherwell and Isis through the sweet-breathed fritillary-studded meadows; the thud of paired oars, the divided honours on the tented field; the glad advent, after that anxious hour, of some old fellow with the Testamur; the long vacation visits; the hearty greeting, as we step into the Quad at the beginning of Term, and come upon three broad-chested fellows arm in arm striding towards the gate; the genial supper that evening together in one of their rooms, sparkling silver, red-clawed lobsters, pink ham, trembling jellies; the spread-eagle next morning at our break-

fast of four, with the four "commons," and the four triangles of butter (the stereotyped viands, you will perceive, are intimately associated with those old days); the gathering in Chapel, the familiar thunder of the rising in Hall; the knots about the Quad afterwards; the greetings, the filing away presently, some two or three, for a glass of wine in some fellow's room who has just come up; one's own dear cosy little den, with the nucleus of books and prints; the well-known tap when your curtains are drawn, and a ready chair vacant by the fireside; the criticisms on the Freshmen; the notes compared on new books; the chat like no other chat, the days like no other days, the friends like no other friends—always a very tonic to our flagged spirits when we meet them in later years:—ah, these old memories, light and grave in turn, bind us for ever to those old friends!

And I look up as I write, and lo, the faces of some half-dozen greet me from the wall of my study, and in their centre is the old Hall of Magdalene, and here are my rooms (I seem to be resting on my elbow, looking out of that window now); and there the rooms of my brother-in-law (as I look, I am straightway reclining on his chair, while he gravely bows towards his pianoforte, and, himself a master in music, expresses music's masterpieces); there is the dining Hall, and there the kitchen, and there the very chrysanthemums, and the quick-growing, short-lived summer creeper; and ah, there the door leading to my staircase; how often has my light foot sprung up it, bound for my own or for some welcoming congenial room: and there is the tall Tower of New, with its grave, familiar chiming of the hours. Easily can I people it all, and summon back the past, though well knowing that it has cast me off,—and that I should be a stranger now in the old Hall, on the old stair-

case, in the old rooms.—But not, not to the old friends ; their possession lasts on, is inalienable ; at any time a letter from one of them is a pleasure, a visit from one a rapture ; and as life steals on, and hoar hairs gather, these are always, and to the last, our ideal of *old friends*.

And when now indeed life has some time ago passed on from the waxing to the waning time, how then we retire, as it were, upon our hoarding of old friends. The young ones spring up about us, we have a kindly heart, a cheery word, a pleasant smile for them ; nay, often a deep devotion, a wistful love which they (how life changes round !) accept with condescension, and repay with tepid affection. But the old friends, yes, the old friends ;—it is our gala day when *these* come to see us. The young people have grown too fast for us ; our Past, our ever dear Past, is as nothing to them ; they do not understand us ; they condescend towards us,—they patronize us. We turn from them relieved, to a fuller sympathy, to mutual tastes, mutual memories, mutual opinions and prejudices and likings. We do not, if we are wise, refuse to go with the stream, but oh, it is pleasant sometimes to dip our oar, and moor beside the bank, for a quiet un-go-a-head talk with one of those who have peopled our remembered, vanished Past. Our Past of fresh energies, and quick emotions, and undimmed gladness : our Past of new trust, and unblunted hope, and unworn faith, and first-tasted love. Our Past of mutual adventures, mutual interests, mutual laughter, mutual tears.—Let me remember a scene, which may well come in here, a scene at which I was an appreciative spectator.

It was the birthday, the seventieth birthday, of one infinitely loved and revered by me ; and we, as was our custom always on his birthday, we, the

younger ones, were met to celebrate it. Unexpectedly, just before dinner, there walked into the drawing-room two of his very oldest friends, brothers-in-law also. It was pleasant to see his face brighten as he greeted them and realized their having come to join the birthday party ; and the caskets of old memories were unlocked, you may be sure, as the evening wore on. But the turkey had been removed, and the plum-pudding discussed, and now the plump oranges and the shrivelled figs and raisins had the table to themselves, and the wine passed round for the Toast of the evening.

Then it was that the elder of the brothers arose, and mysteriously extracted from his pocket, and unfolded, a yellow, ancient-looking document, scored with rusty-brown writing. Fifty years ago it had been written,—fifty years ago, when their hair had no white streak in it, when life, now nearing its ending, had hardly seemed to have well begun. Fifty years ago, in the merry days when they were young men together, and had met, even as now, on the birthday of the host, to celebrate his coming of age. And these were verses written in honour of that event by him who was the present speaker and proposer of this evening's toast. They had been read on that gala-day, and sung then, in merriment and glee ;—then they were laid by,—and a gap of fifty years had opened between that day and this. And many a sorrow and many a gladness had marked the chequered days ; and now the old friends were met together, and the writer of the verses in honour of the twenty-first was reading them at the seventieth birthday.

A simple episode to dwell upon so long ; but let me persuade you to dwell upon it yet longer, and you shall see what food for thought, pathetic thought, melancholy thought, quiet thought, peaceful thought,

might be extracted from this simple incident. Such old memories to come thronging back, across the chasm of years ; such wistful-eyed, such glad-eyed, such mournful-eyed ghosts. The year in its Spring then, and all the leaves and all the blossoms and all the birds coming ; the year in its late Autumn now ; and so many of the leaves circled down, and so many of the flowers gone, and so many of the birds silent. But the touch of sadness which it brought over us for the moment soon passed in the sparkle of merry memories which the elders interchanged, and to which the younger listened.

Shall I say any more yet about old friends ? One word. For there are still some of the dearest who may not now join in our gatherings here ; there are some whose familiar step must never on this earth make glad our hearts again ;—and yet one word should be given, as so many thoughts are by us all devoted, to old friends gone before—old friends in the Churchyard ; old friends in Paradise. Sometimes we wend our way, over the curled Autumn leaves, across the dew-drenched grass,—and hold, or seem to hold, quiet communion with them in the place in which alone now we seem to retain a portion in their old society. The dear sister whom we watched so long, as she faded away from this dying life ; the brave bright man with his grand presence and his sunny smile who was struck down in a few days ; the sweet Mother who left us long ago ; the old man who was our Father's guardian before us, and our kind Mentor in early years,—these are still friends, old friends ; death has rather sealed than severed our love. We are fain to haunt the place where last we laid them,—oftener to look up, and wonder about them, still at our toil :—

“ And in the furrow musing stand,
Does my old friend remember me !”

Where are they? What know they? Where is that Unseen Land in which they wait that not-yet-attained perfection of both body and soul in which we shall one day see them, and clasp them, as we did, yet not as we did, in the days when we walked in sweet fellowship on earth? We shall see them again. Meanwhile, we keep the old friendship ever faithful, ever fervent, in our heart. “*How they'll greet us!*”—we think this when there comes to our thought that nearing day of parting from the old friends here, and joining the glad and waiting company of the old friends there, in that Land of Welcomes, that knows not of Farewells. Surely and certainly, even there, we are fain to think, the bond of old friendship will be one of closer union than any new can weave. And the oldest and truest love of all will at last be realized by us there and then; a love which *began* before that of any other; a Friend also of whom an old Book tells us, that “Having loved His own which were in the world, *He loved them to the end.*”





No. XI.

UNSET BLOSSOM.

HOW much might be written concerning the waste in Nature! The *seeming* waste, I should rather say, for it is my purpose (in this handful of slight poppy-thoughts) to examine into and to disprove this indictment that I have supposed,—this fancied accusation against God's Universe of overprofusion and seeming waste. I am minded to do this only in one instance, however, or under one figure—that of the unfulfilled blossom-promise of the Spring. Much more, no doubt, than this, might be treated of; and therefore I said that very much writing might come under this head of accusations and exculpations of Nature.

But I shall not at this time take in hand the myriad-seeded gourd; each flat seed with its germ of growth, of which the one or two only fulfil their possibilities, the rest come to nought. Nor the rain of smooth brown acorns in November, each slipping out of the rough cup, or pulling it also to the ground, parting company then by the shock: strewing the wet road with the tree's wealth. Smartly pattering down now and then in a gust; falling one by one at lazy intervals in the still days; lying by threes and fives among those leaves which had not the heart to keep their place on the tree, and, daring the rough winter months, to hold the fortress, a sere ghostly

garrison, until the Spring leaves come to relieve them. Lying scattered or clustered, among the leaves, and in the wet ruts, a prize for joyous children ; a meal for gross swine ; or, may-be, crushed on the silvered frost-bound road by the broad wheel of the passing waggon. At any rate, not, save as an exception, waiting, in some wet mossy bed, cosy under a leafy counterpane, until the delicious call of life-bringing Spring bid the thin shell split, and the long straight root strike downward, and the slim shoot, with its opening twin leaves—real oak-leaves—sprout upwards ; and year after year develope the infant growth, and so the germ of life fulfil its destiny ; and every year a grove of oaks spring from the mother-tree. This also being only one forest-instance ; for there are besides, the triangular beech-mast, smooth and ruddy brown, lying heaped thicker than the thin-gold leaves which have spread so rich a carpet for a wide circle about the grey smooth beech-bole ;—and there are the large glossy chestnuts, so round and so flat, that come rustling and bobbing through the large dying leaves, carrying a yellow fan or two with them in their descent ; a prize for old or young, as they lie there, so abundant and so seductive,

“ When the shell
Divides threefold to show the fruit within.”

And the fallow deer come lightly stepping that way with head aslant, carrying their pride of antlers so gracefully ; and this one and that stays a moment to crunch the ripe mouthful ; but hardly one nut, if one, shall attain to the superb perfection of the grand heavy-leaved dome, all lit up, as it were, with the white spikes of blossom.

Then there are also the pale hazel-nuts shaken out of their yellow-green case (but withered now at the

top to a dry brown): seldom indeed left to line the hedge-bank or the copse; harvested by the children and gleaned by the dormice and squirrels. And the peaked Spanish-chestnuts gleaming out of their porcupine envelopes; and the rain of walnuts that, as the tree is thrashed, fall thickly down, breaking the smooth bitter cover here and there, and showing the clean light shell out of the green mottled husk; one or two joyously found, a month after, among the dark heaped leaves, freed almost from the decayed black fibrous covering; none, hardly, passing from the slender sapling into the royal mass of pleasantly-scented foliage.

But one might go on, from brown apple-pips to the stones which lie smooth in the halves of the apricot, or that are torn rugged out of the stained heart of peach and nectarine; or take note of the round cherry-stones that sprinkle the London pavement, at that season when the barrows of flushed bigaroons or swart blackhearts tempt the passers-by. Or the feathery cocoas of tropic lands might supply new instances, or the white pips bedded in the pulp of the lemon and the orange; or, leaving inanimate Nature, we might meditate with wonder upon the roe of the Herring or the Sole: a million of life-germs making a mouthful. For of all these, the point is not that they are altogether wasted, seeing that they provide food, but that it might seem a wonder that of such myriads of marvellous possibilities, germs of such life and growth, only the one or two out of the myriads should fulfil what would seem to be their destiny. Tennyson's "In Memoriam" supplies us with a thought which we may adapt and develope for our present purpose:—

" My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore."

"That nothing walks with aimless feet ;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete."

Now it seems to me that we might push on this thought beyond attained life to the consideration of those germs which have attained so far that they contain all the fittings of life complete in them ; nay, latent life itself : the feather-crested palm curled up in embryo in the cocoa nut : the grove of oaks in the acorn : the silver cherry orchard in the kernel of the round dot that lies smashed on the flagstone. We might muse and philosophize on, in our ignorance and restlessness, obliged probably, if we still retained the humble spirit which alone is the learning spirit, at last to acquiesce in the advice of a poetess of our day—

"Think how in soberness thy wisdom lies,
And have the grace *to wait*."

We might, I say, breast these deeper waters, having, in all likelihood, merely the swim for our pains, and bringing up no pearl of knowledge from those abysses uncounted fathoms beyond our shallow divings ;—but we will not make the essay. Speculations too deep for poppy-thoughts, too wide for such a slight paper, we quit them, and keep to our one theme of unset blossom. Now this has not even the plea of being used as food ; and yet it, at least in its analogies, shall be proved not to have crowded the branches all in waste and quite in vain.

It is the Winter time as I write. Winter : but the Spring-half now, not the Autumn-half of the Winter-months. And though we can find in our hearts to love the Winter, when we have settled down to it, and the last leaves have gone, and the first icicles have

come, yet it needs really but the first herald (be it golden aconite or clear thrush-song) of the Spring, to cause our allegiance to be at once and easily transferred. We were content, perforce, while the iron gate was locked, and we were aware of no key; but, directly we, fumbling in our bosom, find one morning the key of Hope, we are eager in anticipations of leaving our Winter durance for the freedom of the Spring. And so now, that a warm sun is shining, and one blue violet detected among the old leaves, and one polyanthus tipping its orange cup with scarlet, I am reminded, and my heart leaps up at the reminding, that we have now entered upon January, and that at every relaxing of his grip, some prisoner will be squeezing through the reluctant fingers of Giant Winter. True, January and February are stern generals, but when having, they fondly imagine, subdued the country, they intermit for a day or two their vigilance, lo! (like Scotland whenever King Edward drew away for a little space), up start, in single spies and in battalions, the irrepressible rebels, continually reinforced, never losing ground that they have taken into possession; victorious at last, when March has brought their Bannockburn.

And so, on a warm day in January, one thinks not so much of Winter's returning forces, as that we are not now retrograding from September towards dark December, but advancing, every week a step nearer, to April and to May. And, as with the Pilgrims in the Land of Beulah, messengers from the Summer regions meet us at every step: here a band of white-robed snowdrops, here a crocus in shining raiment, or clad in the purple; here a daisy with the star on her forehead. Yes, the Winter is as good as gone, when we have advanced from units to tens in January.

And the weeks go by, faster, faster; and we have

made some progress through the never-tiring programme of the early year,—from the trembling hazel catkins to the red young leafage of the oak ; and now we are expecting that ever new, ever delicious show of the blossom-time. True, the blackthorn has already sprinkled the hedges with its chilly white, and the plums on the wall have followed suit, yet is this but a dull-hued scanty robing compared to that which will shortly glorify the orchards. But even now the great pear blossoms are opening, and the apples are covered with the bunches of crimson buds, and the cherries are arrayed in dazzling silver,—and in a little while, passing through Herefordshire or Kent, the eye has a feast indeed. Looking down from some hill up which we have toiled, how wonderful it is, that sight of the acres of blossom ! Wonderful, for each time that we see it some years probably have passed since we saw that sight. We were busy in London, the last several blossoming-times, or we were in some far foreign land, or merely in a part of the country in which were few orchards. At another time, instead of looking down on the blossom, we are passing under it ; and it much contents us to look up at the rosy or snowy wealth beautifying the jagged branches grey with lichen, against the blue ; or to sit for a quiet meditative half-hour upon some sloping mossy trunk,

“ And see
How fast the honey bees in settling shake
The apple blossoms on us from the tree.”

And this quotation brings us to what might well be the point of that sedate musing. How fast—indeed how profusely—the tinted snow or the silver snow steals down ! Only imagine, we are tempted to exclaim, if all this promise were fulfilled, if the amount of fruit were justly represented by the amount of blossom ! Wouldn't apples and pears and cherries be

cheap ! But now not one tithe of this promise is to be fulfilled. Fast, fast it snows down, the unset blossom ; just beautiful for the time, but, as it would seem, no whit useful ; frail, fragile, exquisitely lovely for its week of bud, its day of bloom ; but there an end. A vision of loveliness while it briefly lasted ; but, after a few days, gone, and leaving no trace.

And better so ; for even the fruit that is set will want thinning, to the end that the tree may concentrate its energies upon fewer undertakings, bringing them thus to a nobler maturity, rather than distribute its powers among schemes too many for it to be possible to finish them. Leaving thus many to drop off, abortive and shrivelled ; and making even those which lasted to be stunted and dwindled, rather than fair and full. Yes, better, in truth, that much of the show should be merely unset blossom, loveliness that ends in loveliness, and passes not into use.

Only why then have this excess of barren blossom ? Well, it might seem answer enough to point to the glory and beauty of the spectacle, and to remind the questioner how sorry a sight would the spring orchards present if only clad with just the number of blossoms that were needed for the fruit. But truly I can guess at other reasons to be given for this apparently overprofusion, this (so to call it) waste in Nature. For instance, though these blossoms come to nothing, may they not be useful in drawing up the sap which shall nourish and make fine fruit of those which are set ? The tree that has not had lavish, overmuch blossom, is not, methinks, as a rule, that which bears much or fine fruit. Which thought brings us to our parallels and analogies.

First loves. What mere idle unset blossom might these be called ! Lovely in the crimson bud, lovely in the flushed, dewy bloom ; but stealing down soon to

the summer grass in only the faintest summer air. So many even on the bunch of one life, but an impossibility that all can come to maturity : frail blossom, evanescent ; over-delicate for lasting existence. I cannot quite countenance such a crowded bunch as I find in the following verses, but I must quote them, as being so much to the point.

“ In the records of my breast
Red-lettered, eminently fair,
Stood sixteen, who, beyond the rest,
By turns till then had been my care ;
At Berlin three, one at St. Cloud,
At Chatteris, near Cambridge, one,
At Ely four, in London two,
Two at Bowness, in Paris none,
And last, and best, at Sarum three :”

So Vaughan, in “ The Angel in the House.”

But which of us that has ever had any wide capacity of heart, any generosity of disposition, any tendency to go out of self to seek (so to put it) self's complement in another, but has his one or two real, earnest boy-loves to look back upon and to contemplate with a tender, allowing heart, regarding them, even now, not as altogether unreal things? Boy-loves that came

“ As ere the Spring attains her power,
The almond branch all turns to flower,
Though not a leaf is out :”

loves that, if only beautiful, and not useful at all, are yet gently and kindly remembered. But I shall try to find out even some use in them presently.

How charmingly are these particular bunches of unset blossom sketched in colours by Charles Dickens in “ David Copperfield !” But, I repeat, nearly every one of us has some studies of these in the portfolio of his own life ; and it is not ill (I think) to turn sometimes the bound leaves, that in later years have, per-

haps, become more like those of account books, and to spend an idle half-hour in poring over those profitless illuminated writings of those early days, writings which are, indeed, much like real illuminations; the same flowers in different arrangements; the same posies and rhymes, on differently-twisted scrolls—the same golden ground to all.

Which shall I select from my own modest two or three, as the best way of setting others busy with their own kindred memories? Let it be the last and longest Ideal love, before the Real one came. Let the gleam of her golden hair, that I could just see over the high partition, in the neighbouring pew, once more content my heart, being then to be watched without check or abashment. Let me go again long, lonely walks, in the hope and upon the mere chance of meeting her, and then, the great object attained, stammer, mutter, say or do something awkward, and then go writhing home. Let me again carefully hoard for months my slender store of pocket money, in order that I may buy a forget-me-not ring, with which just carelessly to tie the bunch of large white snowdrops that were to address her on St. Valentine's day :—

“When first our timid heads we trembling reared,
Too frail and weak stern Winter to defy,
No pleasant sun our pallid blossoms cheered,
No hope was ours,—save that we soon might die;
Yet oh, the kindness in thy deep blue eye,
The golden hair that crowns thy beauteous brow,
Are like the summer sun and azure sky
That we have loved to dream of; and we bow
Our dying heads in peace, in radiant sunshine now !”

Or violets another time—dark, Lent-coloured violets.

“Golden-haired girl, more fair than Spring,
Smile once upon us ere we fade !
Our little all, our life, we bring,
Too richly by that smile repaid ;

—But if, our humble suit denied,
Thou turn'st away disdainfully,—
Sufficient is it to have died,
Seeking to pleasure thee !

“ So love full oftentimes may live
No answer hoping to obtain,
Its life, its all of earth, would give,
And never ask a smile again ;
With fond and unrepining breast
It lays its richest treasures down,
And counts itself not all unblest
But to escape a frown.”

Poor stuff, I grant you ; but written from a true heart ; really meant, I promise you, at the time. It is, I think, a beautiful trait in this unset blossom of which I am now speaking, that its brief life is such an unselfish life. No sordid anticipation of the fruit to which it shall hereafter attain ; simply a desire to appear lovely in some chosen eyes, content to be plucked by some dear hand, counting it enough to have given all and received nothing. And here I seem to detect one of the *uses* of this blossom-love,—even that it has for its mission to take the young heart out of self, to teach it the beginnings of that lesson of unselfishness, self-denial, self-surrender, self-sacrifice for the good of others, that is almost the grand lesson of life on earth. And we can imagine that often in no other way could the lesson be learnt, in no other way could we be taught to go out of our self, give self quite up, merging it in, devoting it to, a higher, purer, nobler self (so to speak) ; and such, whether justly or no, do our ideal loves appear to us. They appear as “ the reflex of the thought within our heart,” the embodiment of that nobility, that purity, that loveliness, towards which the heart and mind, being, however fallen, partakers of the Divine Nature, naturally soar at first, until snares of earth and sin

have limed their wings, or devil's shears have clipped their feathers.

I see, then, even a part of God's teaching, a stage in His intended course of discipline and instruction, in the light thing (many would call it) of which I am treating. First in this course comes the lesson of simple obedience to authority, to a will placed above our own. This learned, if we would learn it, then next we seem set to learn the lesson of how to use our dawning freedom of choice and action—even in surrender of self for the good of another; so we become students in the school of self-sacrifice; surely a God-like attribute. For love is of God, and of God comes the GREAT EXAMPLE of self-sacrifice for the loved. "*Greater love hath no man than this, That a man lay down his life for his friends.*" Nor do I think that this is too grave a weight of meaning to put upon these unset blossoms of mine, that, if they have no promise of fruit, have yet their store of honey, which a careful prying bee may extract, if he will take pains to get into the heart of them. Not for nothing were the profuse, seemingly—only seemingly—*waste* masses called up over the branches and the heart in the young, glad spring time. They have a meaning, a purpose, be sure, since He ordained them to whom nothing that He sends was intended to return void. They were sent on an errand, whether they rightly fulfil it or no.

First loves. Have not these, therefore, their work to do, even though they set into no tangible fruit for the after years? Though they themselves come to nothing, have I not reason in ascribing to them an office of usefulness in drawing up the sap which shall nourish and make fine fruit of that which is set? Have they not a service to perform, a work to do, a work of teaching, a work of preparation, in their brief, graceful life, which smiles out into the early

Summer for its short while, and then fleets away and appears no more ?

Not all in vain ; no, not all in vain. They prepare the heart, as it were, for more enduring loves, prepare it, I contend, even for the highest love of all ; keeping it tender, teaching it to be unselfish ;—unselfishness being the very life of that ideal blossom-love. Indeed, to those who regard it more deeply than to scoff and mock at it, in this attribute of unselfishness lies the chief grace and beauty of this flushed, transitory bloom.

Nor when the set blossom comes, and, the mere sentiment dying away, the enduring germ of that love appears, which is no longer an ideal and evanescent, but the real and enduring love, need the dear wife at all grudge that her lord should still treat tenderly and reverently the old pure and lovely visions of his immaturity. All the while they endured they were but training his heart for that true and positive love into which they culminated, rather, to which they gave place, and which he laid at her feet ; an offering far more worthy than could be presented by that cold heart that passed through the teens and never learned the alphabet of love's lesson. Unset blossom : but while it lasted, it made the tree splendid, and shewed surely a better condition of life and vigour than if only one solitary bud had dawned late on the cold and naked boughs, one laggard blossom at last opened. Better, surely, for her, the true Queen, to own the one set blossom out of the whole lovely wealth of the masses of the Spring—Then they were the heralds that went before the Queen ; or the bridesmaids, that did but escort the Bride, and forthwith passed away into insignificance. O yes, I maintain that all these barren blooms did but prove the virtue and the vigour of the tree, and that she were foolish indeed who

should look askance at that prelude part of the creation which was but preparing a well-adorned Garden, for her own abode. Not faithlessness, not fickleness, but the exuberance of faith and constancy, thus crowded the branches with rosy bloom. And the ONE inherits all the stores of devotion, of unselfishness, of loyalty, of tenderness, which have been all the while storing up for her by the many.

Generally, love and poetry (unset-blossom poetry) go together, and these early poetic essays will, as a rule, betray this attribute of unselfishness—the longing more for self-sacrifice than for attainment—of which I have spoken as being the very life of that ideal blossom-love. And I could laugh a kindly laugh, as I read over (in some idle mood) the carefully laboured offsprings of the youthful muse, to see how little the commonplace notion of ever marrying seems to have entered into the ideas of that sublimed devotion. Adoration sublimed into chiefly delighting (it would appear) in picturing another in possession of the Treasure, and ourself as the high-minded guardian of that happiness in which we rejoice and acquiesce even the more because it is our own proper bane. Nay, it is not so: bane is not the word at all; prove but that greater happiness is procurable for the beloved object from her choice of another, and we more than reconcile ourselves to the loss; we would leave nothing undone to further the accomplishment of her wish. Most delightful vision of all, that in which the Beloved steps over our Corpse to the attainment of her desire.

But generally, though we loyally acquiesce in her choice and would not lift finger to alter it, yet we cannot but misdoubt its wisdom. It is not at all on our own account that we demur—no; only that

we are dispassionately anxious for her best welfare ; hence we must, perforce, feel a certain sadness at her rejection of ourself, her (if she but knew it) most faithful, most suitable companion for life. But she knows not our real self ; never will ; never can ; and garish tinsel, sham excellence, has dazzled her. 'Tis pity, but it cannot be helped. May she never find out her mistake, this is our sincere anxiety—unless indeed she *should* do so before it be too late to rectify it. Merely out of our yearning for her greatest happiness, we wish—we may not *hope*—that this might be so. How admirably, by the way, has Coventry Patmore, in his sweet—seeming simple but really deep—poem, depicted this refinement of self-setting-aside (to coin a word), where the lover, although he will not suffer a wish for himself to cross the choice of his lady, yet, for *her* sake, cannot but permit the regret that she has not chosen him ! For who else can love her, would tend her, as himself ? And ought not the *best* of all to fall to her lot ?

“What measure fate to him shall mete
Is not the noble lover's care ;
He's heartsick with a longing sweet
To make her happy as she's fair.
Oh, horror, should she him refuse,
And so her dearest good mistake !
His own success he thus pursues
With frantic zeal *for her sole sake*.
To lose her were his life to blight,
Being loss to hers ; to make her his
—Except as helping her delight,—
He calls but incidental bliss ;
And holding life as so much pelf
To buy her posies, learns this lore :
He does not rightly love himself
Who does not love another more.”

Yes, I cannot but champion this early exuberance

of the sweet blossoms, that, springing from the very desire to obtain joy for self, pass on into even the abnegation of all gladness of life for self, in order to the ministering all joy to another.

I confess to sympathy with the culprit, in the following case, which I cut from a newspaper, being struck by its exceeding hardship. Had it been necessary (unromantic idea!) to chastise the precocious youth, it should surely have been with a rod of sugar-cane bound round with myrtle. But methinks the punishment exceeded the offence.

“An action was brought in the — County Court on Wednesday, on behalf of a boy, aged thirteen, the son of a grocer, against the Rev. —, the Rector of —, for an assault, the damages being laid at 10*l*.

“It appeared that the boy had imagined himself in love with a little girl, named Constance — who sat in an adjacent pew to that his father occupied in church, and had written the following letter to his small sweetheart :—

“‘From one who loves you.—Dear Consey—I write these few lines to you, hoping to find you quite well. I wish to see you, hoping I shall not be long to (*sic*) my wish is gratified (*sic*). If not, please to drop me a line or so, as I am anxious to know the answer. Excuse bad writing. With best love, believe me your affectionate lover and well-wisher,

“‘W. H.’”

“This very innocent effusion fell into the hands of a widow lady named Clarke, with whom ‘Consey’ lives. She took it to the defendant, who at once went to the plaintiff’s school, and took him away to the rectory, when he beat the boy severely with a cane. The rev. gentleman then took the plaintiff home to

his father, and said that the lad had been guilty of an abominable insult towards the young lady.

"The defendant on being called, said that he considered the letter an insult, not from anything abominable in it, but because it had been sent by a grocer's son to a young lady in a different position.

"The jury at once returned a verdict for the plaintiff for the full amount claimed."

Does not the above simple story of premature romance and sentiment in real life remind us of David Copperfield and Miss Shepherd, at the Miss Nettigall's Establishment? How he used to put her name into the prayer for the Royal Family and into the chanting of the choristers, and how he used, when alone in his room to ejaculate, "Oh, Miss Shepherd!" in a transport of love; and to present to the beloved object, Brazil nuts and soft seedy biscuits and oranges innumerable. You see, even here lies a proof of that I said about the lesson of unselfishness taught by this blossom-love. Consider the devotion evidenced by the fact of a schoolboy's wholesale sacrifice of pocket-money and "grub" to the object of his affections! And I say, daring ridicule for saying so, that there was something good and wholesome and that might act favourably upon the future character, in the nonsense (if you please to call it so) of that fruitless, immature devotedness.

I am writing these pages for those who have something of kindred experiences in their past years, whose hearts were like a laid fire—shavings at the bottom, wood over these, coal at the top. Granted that the shavings, which caught so easily, burnt out quickly, then the wood lasted longer; and above this was the coal which, igniting last, burnt on longest. But the shavings and the fagots had their own proper work to do, and if soon no trace of them was left, yet the

effect wrought by them remained. Those whose hearts were thus built up, and thus easily caught fire, will understand me, and be interested in these slight meditations ; the more strong-minded will skip this essay.

But let me, with the kindlier hearts, revert to my own time of profuse unset-blossom. Let it be the Winter, and let me be returning from my artist studies at the Royal Academy ; an ermine carpet on the ground, and swansdown tippets adorning every lamp-post and window-sill. And let it be once again the delight of my walk that I may, by a slight *détour*, pass through the familiar no-thoroughfare street in which stands the London house which is at present the casket of my Jewel. Let me take delight once more to stand in the snow on the edge of the pavement, watching the lights in the rooms, and the shadows on the blinds. Let it be a melancholy fascination to me to hug to the heart the misery of being, as it were, an outcast, standing in the snowy street, away from the light and warmth ; the misery of not being with her myself—of imagining others with her ;—of fancying her smiling on them—nay, on one of them ; of excruciating my heart by conjuring up the profanation of a kiss pressed on her “lips’ young red” by alien fervour. Let me trace, or seem to trace, *her* shadow on the blind ; and at last go gloomily home, really (I imagine) enjoying the gloom ; and thereafter set down the whole matter in poetry—or what seemed such to me : drawing an ingenious parallel between our probable future histories from the incident of that solitary watch in the snow :

“How for thee the cheerful firelight
And for me the cold blank snow,
Ever seem the part allotted
Never canst thou know.”

Or let me come suddenly upon her one day in Hyde Park, smiling and lovely, looking kindly even on me—(why the "*even*," might puzzle wiser heads to explain)—and after the brief delight of the meeting, let her pass away, with her sister and her Governess, and be lost among the crowds that are coming, gay and blithe, from listening to the Band. Lost? Not so; for am I not, like one of Cooper's Indians, stealthily tracking her, stealing from tree to tree; unseen, unsuspected, and gloating over that fact; half cherishing a vague hope that a runaway horse, or a fall into the Serpentine, may give me that long imagined opportunity of rescuing her and just breathing my devotion, as (perfect compensation) she wept over my "dying form?"

Or let that evening come again, when there was dancing and merriment on the summer lawn, and after, in the lit room with its French windows opening on to the garden. And let the dark suspicion gloom suddenly on my heart that the fatal hour has come—that she not only is beloved—that of course—but loves again! So let me walk forth into the night, and "watch the dark forms flitting across th' illumined room," and make common cause somehow with a tall black lonely Pine, with the bright evening star glistening in its lashes, and catch the weird-sounding dance-music now murmuring now bursting in snatches into the still-deserted garden; and again, set this all to poetry:

"The merry music pealing
Fell sadly on mine ear,
For o'er my hopes came stealing
Thoughts desolate and drear,
Like warning winds that stir the leaves
Before they disappear."

And let me go over it all with a very relish, as I said just now; hugging that misery to my heart, really

enjoying it, if the truth were told ; planning the being in Church secretly at the Wedding (when you really love, you would probably prefer to go miles away) ; keeping still in view the great acme and crown of all, to die for her—to die even for *Him*. In real love, again, you would prefer to be quietly united to her yourself.

How well is this unset-blossom-love, as distinct from the actual love that sets, and attains maturity, drawn for us in Romeo and Juliet ! In the ideal devotion Romeo is well content to wander about away from his kind, evidently relishing and revelling in his despair and dejection, taking a pride in displaying it ; making no effort, it would seem, to lay siege in right earnest to the fair lady's heart. But on seeing Juliet, and conceiving in very deed the reality of love, lo ! the sentimental lover becomes a practical man, with common sense and energy, going in, as it were, to win ; assailing the Maiden's self, instead of wandering about in dark groves talking to her glove.

Nevertheless, I maintain, there is a very tender grace and beauty about all this unreal (nonsensical, the hard heads call it) love, this barren blossom of the heart in its spring-time. True, when we come to the precincts of forty, a cheque-book may seem to us a more necessary and tangible pocket-companion than that small red gilt-backed volume (which yet might probably be rummaged out somewhere from our shelves), the "Language of Flowers." Life's prose necessities have roughly obtruded themselves upon us. We can't go back to our own early days of sentiment, nor is it desirable that we should. Still, we need not, even suppose we have made it for ourselves, proclaim the pleasing discovery to others just flushing into the blossom-days—that all that sort of thing is humbug. There may be, and *is*, often no doubt much that is

weak and washy in boy and girl-love ; and this should be checked, and manliness and reality infused even into that which (we may secretly know) is nothing but soon-scattered, unset blossom. Yet, if but for "Auld lang syne," for the sake of our own old memories, our own far-away experiences—even though our own apples be matured, stowed away, withering, it may be, a little now,—we should surely be patient with trees that are just rising into that full overcrowded brief loveliness, and we should be reverent and tender towards the beauty of that excessive promise, even though we well know that so much must flutter down, fruitless, unfulfilled. To recur to that same red pocket volume—is there, when we have turned forty, *nothing* of kindly reminiscence left for it, no dried blossom, as it were, shut up in it? nothing that brings a smile, pensive rather than contemptuous, to the lips, a softness to the usual abstraction of the eyes? What! have we not, treasured still, pressed in some choice book of poetry, even the very flower she gave us, in some more gentle mood? And must we not own that we were in terrible earnest when we threw that spray of "chestnut tree" with its appealing message over the terrace wall? And was there not an old prettiness about those times, that the ledger-days seem (if you pause to think)—seem a little to want?

For there is a sadness about the fall of the blossom, even of that which was not unset, even of that of which we have stored the fruit. The poetry of life goes, in great measure (excepting for swallow-flights of return), when life's Spring and early Summer have fled; and a dull prosaic routine seems to have settled upon most lives after the newness of the year has left us. Then Autumn comes, and the fruit sometimes remembers the old blossom-beauty, and burns into colour—not those delicate fairy-tints—colour richer, more decided, maturer.

—O World which will somehow unite the grace and the glory of both Promise and Fulfilment!

But, meanwhile, in *this* world we are at school, and are to disregard no stage of our teaching, to despise no teacher in any stage. And if it be true that this unset-blossom of boy-love has for its mission the teaching us self-sacrifice, self-denial for another, surrender of self-interests, it surely has its use, as well as (I think) its beauty; and I am abundantly excused for lingering on reminiscences of a thing so short-lived and frail.

And many more instances might be brought forward of this over-profusion (?) of blossom upon the Orchards in the Spring-tide. There are, for another example, our grand, unrealized, often unrealizable schemes. Blossom crowding the branches, flushed bunches of full bloom, innumerable buds yet pushing their way upon the bough; dreams, visions, never to be fulfilled, incapable of fulfilment, yet beautiful, and surely not without a use. No, for they keep the sap flowing, ready; they prevent stagnation; they nurture and sustain the generous flow of the first abundant life; the fruit that sets shall be the better, perhaps, for the full wealth of blossom that seemed to come to nought; one week transfiguring the orchard; the next, crumbling into the common clay. And the tree (let me say again here) that has not had lavish, overmuch blossom, is not (at least in human husbandry) that which bears much or fine fruit.

And so content you, and be not over-harsh, O grave, matter-of-fact man, coming out of your granaries and stored fruits into the lovely landscape of the Spring. See, you are dry and grizzled now, and age, as with hoary lichen, is making your head grey. But once for you also the spring airs were blowing,

once for you also came that strange, tumultuous stirring of the sap, that innumerable bursting into bud, into blossom. That idea and thought (graceful in its unselfishness, however unpractical and barren), of living only in the springtime,—only for beauty and love, and not for sordid fruit. Once for you also was that undoubting looking forward to feeling ever the first rush and energy of being, that could not but crowd the boughs with a thousand graceful thoughts, loves, schemes, hopes, too frail, indeed, even to last through the summer-airs, far more to withstand the rough wind and weather that lurked in the later year. And if you will once take the pains, as you sit, thrumming on your chair, and listening to an old song, to remember all this, I know you will relax your severe brow, and let the spring orchards bloom their brief hour unreprieved. I half think that even on your own gnarled branches, I may,—as, reading this page, you fall into a reverie,—see smiling timidly out, if but one late bunch of half-abashed, surprised, rose-streaked, crumpled blossom :—

“ Oh I see the blossom-promise of my spirit hath not set ;
Ancient founts of inspiration well through all my fancy yet.”

Nor, to end, shall my Real love quarrel with these kindly reminiscences of the graceful old Blossom loves. They had even all fallen away, for a fair open space before, Queenlike, she entered the heart which they had delicately strewn for her entrance.





NO. XII.

WINTER TIME, AND TWELFTH NIGHT.

HOW delightful it is to meet with that kindly heart and genial disposition, which most naturally and readily turns to pleasant things. Which of us does not know by experience the difference of bias,—the opposite manner of regarding the same things (that yet seem so different from different points of view) which in greater or less degree divides men into two classes? Some men and women have a certain tonic influence,—not only that of sympathy, which is a power so potent to “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,” but the knack of setting life’s bright events in a yet brighter light : its sadnesses in a less impervious gloom. Daylight becomes sunshine in their society ; darkest night begins to sparkle with stars. Of this genial class surely was that cheery Dutchman who fell from the mast-head of his vessel, and, upon his shipmates crowding round him with long faces to condole with his broken leg, startled them by being found in high glee and spirits because it was not his neck !

Verily, there are two ways of looking at things. There are those, in the journey of life, whose one object appears to be to pick out all the puddles and rotten places in their road. And these are sure to be successful in their search. There are those also who have a firm conviction that, with a little picking their way, they may light upon fair travelling. And it is

wonderful how many dry spots these find out in the very road which to a companion seemed ankle-deep in mud. Life has its sadnesses; and they must be endured; nay, reverently *welcomed*: even as, in truth, blessings, and blessings hardly in disguise. For we are but at school here, and tearful tasks and sharp chastenings are one part, and that, perhaps, the most useful part of our training. But the holidays and the half-holidays come, and may be enjoyed, if we will enjoy them; and the thought of yesterday's correction or to-morrow's task need not check that blithe "Hurrah!" and hilarious burst out, with stumps or football, into the sunny playground, or into the summer field.—And I have seen sometimes even the dry chalk cliff, or the heap of bleak stones, crested with the jet and scarlet of a tossing of poppy-banners.

How different your face after a good bite at a sloe-berry in November from its expression after making your teeth meet in a Moor-park apricot! And how different is your feeling when you contemplate the spider sucking away the unlovely life of the blue-fly that always haunted disagreeable places and sought out unpleasant things, from that with which you note, fluttering forlorn and bodiless in the web, the "splendid wings" that remind you of a bright life most at home in the sunshine, and having a natural affinity with heliotropes and geraniums and all sweet and lovely things!

And as, in selecting our friends, we should prefer to select from the baskers against south walls, and the haunters of summer plots, rather than from the iron-pear class, or the offal-seeking-fly class, so also in our willing choice of memories and of subjects for quiet musings. Is it not a relief to turn from those dark days, from those bitter hours which, like useful but nauseous drugs, are stored on memory's shelves,

and to take out samples rather from her stores of sweet preserves and dried fruits? Apricot-days that once swelled round and full upon the summer wall, but that, dried and shrunken, yet retain their old sweetness, and much of their rare flavour. Strawberry-hours that, in life's June, tempted, square and yellow-seeded, scarlet-ripe on the beds: serving for a dainty repast at the time, but also stored by the careful housewife, Memory, to come out in life's winter days.—Not with the same vivid colour, not with the same choice aroma,—still whole strawberries bedded in the jam (like that Mammoth in the Siberian ice), still redolent with true strawberry flavour, and able to call up before us the things they once were: the ripe and luscious pleasures, the jewel-fruit on the leafy summer bed.

Well, thus I have passed, rather faithlessly, from poppies to dried fruits, in my similitude. But the season which is my theme must be my excuse: who can call up the summer-flowers over the rugged brown corn-lands, hardened into very rock for a while under the sway of the first sharp frost of winter? So the old winter-delights which it pleases now to recall shall for the nonce be regarded as preserved fruits rather than as "Poppies spread."

Winter time. Yes, we have not, in recalling these days, to look far for pleasant things—for jam to take life's powders in. I confess to a love for the time,—when once we have settled down to it. You winced a little as you saw it coming: the thinning trees, the pinched garden, the later and later sunrise (for that old delight of the sunlight flooding the blinded rooms at five o'clock in the morning), the cold *cold* bath, the shivering railway journey from town after business was done for the short day; the iron roads, ghostly with streaks of arrested snow; the haze freezing into

icicles on your whiskers and side-hair. You winced a little as you saw it coming. But it is here, and you are soon at home with it. It is bracing, exhilarating weather;—bracing to step out of the glowing bed into the bath with a skin of ice on the surface, and then the rough rub, tingling and smoking all over, with a pardonable elation at having daringly snatched the fearful joy,—also in feeling that it is now over for twenty-four hours. It is stirring to emerge from the just warming breakfast-room into the ringing street, and to spin along at the rate of some five miles an hour, regardless of slow omnibuses that loom out of the frosty haze, and, with slipping horses and blue-nosed passengers, carefully creep along the polished, wrinkled road. How soon you are warm as a toast! Had you stayed by the white-hot fire, cooking yourself now at the back, now at the front, now on this side, now on that, you never could have got warmed right through, as now you are for the day. How the boys invent impossible slides everywhere: how the cabmen beat their arms: and the light sleighs speed by with the tinkle of their bells—

“Silver bells,
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that over sprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.”

But this description will be more exact when you come back in the early evening. There are no stars now, only a round orange orb, shorn of its beams by

the frore, mist-hazed air, instead of being resplendent with glorious rays, simply a dull, red-hot ball. The haze has settled into white feathers, or otherwise absconded, by the time the office lights are out, and you are on your homeward route again ; and now how coldly, fathomlessly clear the heavens are ; and how the keen stars almost pierce you with their pointed glitter. Everybody is bustling and alive ; the frost quickens every one's pace and every one's digestive powers ; there are special wintry cries and shouts and noises : the shops flare out sheets of kindly warm light across the ice-bound streets. The grocers' windows gain confidence, ruddy oranges and pale lemons and heaps of dried fruit coming in with the coming Christmas time. And if the fruiterers are now at some disadvantage, yet they make a brave fight of it with the pyramids of dry-skinned apples, russet, and vermeil-streaked, with the big Jersey chaumontels, and the piles of smooth full chestnuts ; and the sacks of oval hazel-nuts, robust Kentish-cobs, and rough angular Brazils ; here and there, on an upper story, a pine or two, with the muffled orange of its cone, and the muffled green of its leaves, the fruit flanked by light vases crowned with vivid rose-geraniums, or full chrysanthemum snow ("Virgin Queen," or "Empress of India"). But you spin by all these, warm as a toast, and one idea'd as an express train ; until you spring lightly up the steps, and, startling night with your vehement knock, are received, warm, into warm arms, and a warm room, and settle down, glad at heart, for a snug long winter evening.

I must still linger on this theme of the winter programme, before I go on to my Twelfth-cake reminiscences. There are the winter flowers—the one or two—held how precious, in the dearth of these sometimes profuse decorations of God's world ! The Christmas

rose :—why is it not more grown? The large beautiful stars, so tenderly tinged with green, developing one after one on the frosty beds, out of the dark-fingered leaves. So lovely, too, when they are gathered, and you have set them, looking upward, at equal intervals, in the moss and ferns along the zinc trough which rims round the Font at Christmas. Then, indoors, the thick snow of the camelias, or their cherry blush out of the glossy rich green; and the frail and delicate azaleas, salmon or grey-white: and, ripening into colour, ash into blue, fawn into pink, green into clustered lovely large white bells,—the hyacinths in their glasses. Out of doors, again, aconites arrested on the curl, by the renewed frost; snowdrops, always held among our dearest flower-friends; crocus, golden-yolked or purple-hearted; scattered clear yellow stars of the winter jasmine. We prize them much because they are beautiful: more, because they are few.

Winter music: that also is prized because it is rare, as well as for its sweetness. How much more on the winter day you notice and rejoice in the clear bold song of the speckled Thrush, than you will do when the woods are alive with melody. And the low liquid pathos of the faithful Woodlark, singing on the rimed bough, or while skimming the snow-powdered fields: how it touches you, like a friendly voice at a time when you lonelinessly thought yourself neglected and forsaken by all the world. Our darling Robin, he must just be mentioned; there needs no more than his name to call up before us at once his warm breast and dark eye, and to light up the gathering dusk of the winter evening with the clear starlight of his song.

But indoors we have other singers, other minstrelsy. Unless we have been married too long, the Wife, or, if we have been married long enough, the girls, draw

out sundry broad sheets from the portfolio, or dive after certain green or yellow MS. books, and open the piano. Ah! yes, who that loves reading, and music, and the sweet society of home, will not admit a charm in those long winter evenings? Luxurious man, free to-night from all engagements; not required to drive forty miles in a dog-cart, in the teeth of the northeaster, to eight o'clock tea at Miss Allbutt's; nor bound to-night to take a class at the night-school (if a philanthropist); nor, if a parish priest, about (however willingly, for the work's sake) to sally forth for a six-mile trudge through the half-melting sleet, and across the bleak moor, to the cottage-service.—Instead of these, you are to sit down to the long delicious evening, with Tennyson's new poem to read, and silver Alto and golden Soprano feasting your soul to-night to the full. And you revel in Mendelssohn's "O wert thou in the cauld blast!"—and rejoice to think that, on the contrary, you are tucked up before a singularly boisterous fire; you grow pensive over "Oft in the stilly night," or "The last Rose of Summer," old favourites which never pall: you awaken up a little more intellect to enjoy Beethoven's "Adelaida;" you desire and obtain the Autumn song (more properly and suitably the Winter song), written by Hood, and married to music by H. F. L. (I am conferring a boon on *music* lovers by naming it; and I will add, for their behoof, that Robert Cocks, I believe, was the publisher)—a song so suitable to our train of thought, that (as the custom is now-a-days) I will enliven our sedate reading with the light fountain-glitter of singing. Stir the fire, and stand with your back to it, and hear the sweet winter-singing give the lie to the sweet song; for have you not an aviary of your own, spite of the "winter cold?" and are not the sweet birds in full choir to-night?

"The Autumn skies are flushed with gold,
And fair and bright the rivers run ;
—These are but streams of winter cold,
And painted mists that quench the sun.

"In secret boughs no sweet birds sing,
In secret boughs no bird can shroud ;
These are but leaves that take to wing,
And wintry winds that pipe so loud.

"'Tis not trees' shade, but cloudy glooms
That on the cheerless valleys fall :
The flowers are in their grassy tombs,
And tears of dew are on them all."

Delicious ! Of course you call for Inez and the rest of the set of six. Let me commend to this consummate musician, as fit bridegrooms for his subtle melodies, Matthew Arnold's "*Requiescat*," and Robert Browning's "*One way of love*."

But at the very heart of the Winter glows Christmas. The kindly time, the genial time, the time of meetings renewed, and partings remembered. For we most of all, whether consciously or not, realize the communion of saints at Christmas-time. Then it is that we gather together again : the living from all parts of the land : also the dead with quiet eyes of utter peace from Paradise ; and each gathering, unless it be of the very young, has its vacant chair—has its stiller guest—

"Perchance, perchance, among the rest,
And, though in silence, wishing joy."

Let me pause for a moment to indulge in a tender sadness. Ah ! they are gone—they are gone—gone before, and the bitterness is (as we mused when we were standing meditatively regarding the fallen leaves) that we seem so much to forget, to do without them. Thus complaining, we therefore *love* the recurring festal days—Christmas : the birthday : the wed-

ding-day, days which, with their "In memoriam," break in upon our absorbed life—which bow our head in a convulsion of tears upon the last feebly-pencilled letter, the faint marks in the book that comforted them in those sorrowful days of weaning from earth's besetments. I say, we rejoice at some "compelling cause to grieve," which may vindicate us from the imputation of consigning to dull-hearted oblivion that which once seemed so necessary to our life. Ah! we *hate* ourselves sometimes, to think how we *seem* to have almost forgotten. How the merry word or the light laugh seems, just as when those dear ones could hear it, upon the surface of the soul. How life goes on, just as though they had not slipped out of it: the old home ones, the guardians of our childhood, the companions of our youth—one by one turning on us loving eyes of last farewells: and then—forgotten? No, *no*, vehemently NO. 'Tis this bustling, hustling life of ours, 'tis the constant pressure upon us of its ever-new cares, considerations, problems: 'tis the incessant crowding of circumstances upon us that is to blame:—

" Like children bathing on the shore,
Buried a wave beneath,
The second wave succeeds, before
We have had time to breathe."

But the quiet days come—times when the tide is down, and its low murmur is muffled in the distance; holidays—rather, holy days in life's turmoil—times *when they used to be with us*: times when we reassure our upbraiding hearts by finding that indeed we miss them still—that we are faithful to the old loves—that the blank has never really been filled up with the new writing, or that at least the old characters are distinct, distinct, distinct, unobliterated, undimmed, upon the palimpsest of our heart. Dear

reminding days ! and we love no laughter really at all comparably with that hardly-controlled sob, that failing voice, that sudden mist of tears.

Unforgotten—unforgotten : yea, our leisure moments prove this, and avert our self-contempt—and satisfy the unforgetting love, that is eternal now, of faithful hearts in Paradise. And the peace of their face brightens, as with a sun-gleam on calm water, when some swift-flying Angel stays beside them the glide of his white wings, to tell them that they are yet kept in mind, and that, in token of this, their special days are still sacred to their unfaded memory.

I saw, in a newspaper article, of all queer places, a rather subtle analogy, which was new to me, linked with our Christmas gatherings. It connected them with that gathering, at the first Christmas time, of kinsmen with kinsmen, of friends with friends, each going up to his own city, called together at that time by Cyrenius. I thought that the writer had hit upon a curious and sweet foreshadowing of what we all hold to be a special characteristic of the hallowed time ;—that drawing together of kinsmen with kinsmen, of friends with friends, each in the familiar place of his bringing up. Or, if this be left behind in life's march, in that extempore "home" which may nearest recall it. They laugh about us, dear always, dear at Christmas time, the new faces, the buds and blossoms of the hearth—the children. But the old ones, the old home ones, those that were children with us,—we ever keep a place for these. It is the time of gatherings, the time of forgivings, the time when the heart's ice thaws beside the great Christmas fire. It *must* be so, if we would hold communion with the calm hearts that have done for ever with the jars and the pettinesses, and the false pride, and the jealousies—all the little mean accidents of earth-life :—

"In vain shalt thou, or any, call
The spirits from their golden day,
Except, like them, thou too canst say,
My spirit is at peace with all."

Well, one lingers always with a unique fascination about the theme of Christmas: Christmas bells, and Christmas greetings, Christmas-boxes, Christmas fires, Christmas memories, Christmas reunions; Christmas hopes, and above all, and pervading all, the great Christmas story. All has been said often about the subject, we almost admit, that can be said: still we never tire of saying and hearing the old things again. Christmas parties there are, too, and Christmas games, and the elders grow young again, and the young live in a sort of dreamland of ecstasy. But these days soon go by, and what is there left, after Christmas is past, for the young hearts to look forward to? Ah! there it is, another special day, as it were a second rainbow, fainter than the first, but still a dream-day for children, and boys and girls, and young men and young women:—nay, I have before claimed to include also the elders. There is yet the remnant of the Christmas merry-makings; the children have some parties yet in the future, which those who are not children, nor young people, shall attend, with hearty zest, for auld lang syne; *these* have several more turkeys and plum-puddings to discuss or to contemplate;—but above all, there is TWELFTH NIGHT to come, and who shall be king and who shall be queen! How excitedly shall the hearts of boy and girl lovers beat, as the smooth slips and the crinkled slips are handed round.

Twelfth Night: yes, one of the few holy days which are, as all should be, kept as holidays! (Let me suggest to Parents, by the way, how admirable a plan it would be universally to make them all so, all the

red-letter days holidays, for governess and children.) Twelfth Night ! Little, however, are the Eastern Star and the wise Kings with their gifts connected in most minds with the festivities of the day. This flaw might be rectified, and a halo cast about the merriment, which should rather enhance than dull its brightness. At present, how many children would not even know their gala day by the name of the Feast of the Epiphany !

Yet what a charm there is for us all in this fascinating story, which if not a part of the Christmas brightness, yet seems, as I said, to be a second rainbow, with the same soft tints, only somewhat less vivid—a paler Christmas day.

“ Earth has many a noble city,
Bethlehem, thou dost all excel :
Out of thee the Lord from Heaven,
Came to rule His Israel.

“ Fairer than the sun at morning,
Was the Star that told His birth,
To the world its God announcing,
Seen in fleshly form on earth.

“ Eastern sages at His cradle,
Make oblations rich and rare ;
See them give, in deep devotion,
Gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

Is there not, as with Christmas, an old child's charm about the story ? The new Star, bright and dazzling in the sky, and the Eastern Astrologers—expecting at that very time the fulfilment of I know not what remnant or report of prophecy—suddenly beholding its bright unique radiance one night or one day, and thereupon implicitly trusting themselves to its guiding. “ Can we not picture to ourselves the excitement and amazement in Jerusalem, as those travel-stained men entered into the city of David with the one

question on their lips, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?' "*

We wonder sometimes about these Magi of the East, they come so suddenly, and as suddenly disappear. And then we hear no more of them. What! did they contentedly return to their own land after that profound acknowledgment and adoration of the Infant, who, marvel of marvels, was indeed their God? And did all that wonderful Life and Death and Resurrection and Ascension, attract them no whit; nor cause them to make any sign? This were strange, that they should so earnestly seek at the beginning, and having so far found, subside into apathy. A common thing, we must acknowledge, in poor human nature, this eager beginning and slack continuance. But we need not impute such lukewarmness to these Eastern kings; no; thirty years had passed before the Babe was anointed for the beginning of His ministry, and, doubtless, the sages were, by that time, watching from another world the development and fulfilment of that course which they, almost alone among the world's millions, had perceived and sought out in its beginning.

Well, but now, leaving these speculations, we turn to the keeping of this Feast of the Epiphany, this much-watched-for Twelfth-day, among our English boys and girls, yea, in the time of our own youth. I will be bold to call it the feast of boy and girl lovers, especially. And why? Well, what I have yet to say will shew.

Only, by the way, we must remark upon how *real* this boy-love seems and is, the timid cluster that appears even before the crowding flush of unset blossom. Have we not at from twelve to fourteen felt fiercest rapture, jealousy, despair?

* Ellicott's "Life of Christ."

Have we no old pocket-book in which we treasured, ay, for years, the tattered gold of the cracker that she held with us, the motto that leapt out to our share, the flower that she graciously gave us in an acquiescent hour ;—possibly, yes, *possibly*, the brown or golden tress, whose granting quickened the ecstasy of our soul to almost delirium ? Do we not, though now we be old, still find sweetness in the magic touch of the lips, behind the rocking-horse, in the twilight, that took place in our boyhood days ? Or even yet writhe with madness at our folly and chicken-heartedness in fearing and failing to snatch that intoxication from the pouting twelve-year-old lips, that did (we perceive afterwards) even challenge a taste of their wild-rose wealth ?

Ah, what follies for a grave man to write about ! Well ; I know not, I detect a tender beauty in the mimic (yet real) earnestness of the throbs and stings of that time of miniature and undeveloped manhood and womanhood. At any rate, I cannot describe Twelfth-day without it, for indeed the zest of its enjoyment, especially and pre-eminently, arises, I repeat, from its connexion with this boy and girl love-making.

But let us call up the Twelfth-night evening of our long ago. It is to be at our own house. Cleaning of rooms, preparing of good things, laying of supper tables, these preliminaries (like the setting the bells before the peal) have kept up the somewhat more than gentle excitement all day. It grows keener and more irrepressible as five o'clock draws near, and the elder brother is expected from London—with the Twelfth-cake ! And, lo ! we hear his key in the front door, and the younger ones are dancing about him as he stamps off the snow and tediously rubs his boots on the mat. But a cry of delight has greeted the large square deal box that he has brought with him ; and

many tongues are eager with questions. "Is it a large one?" "Is it a pretty one?" "What is the middle ornament?" "Is there any curled citron on it?" "What are the characters like?" To each and all of these interrogatories the brother preserves an unmoved and tantalizing silence, like Randolph Murray, in Aytoun's splendid "Edinburgh after Flodden." "What a shame!" resounds after his disappearance with the prize into the pantry. But there is consolation in having seen that the box was a big one. And presently the children are admitted to a sight of the sheet of Characters and their cover, with its huge pictured twelfth-cake. Of *course*, the characters are not pretty, nor even fairly comic; but they will serve their purpose. The only pretty ones I ever saw were a set of flowers; a flower to each character, which, on being raised, disclosed some fay of the court, and the Fairy King and Queen. Once only, however, I have met with this more graceful rendering. How much scope for elegant or witty thoughts might be found by some enterprising purveyor in this department of Art! And even a slight matter, if it be worth doing at all, is worth doing well. Let me offer one or two suggestions. The Court and principal men at any given time in English History. The characters in Shakspeare's plays. The Court of the Sleeping Beauty.

But my young people are busy, (as a tea-party of old maids,) cutting up the characters, whatsoever they may be, and folding them—smooth for the gentlemen; crimped for the ladies; these to be in a salver, those in a hat. And so the preparations are complete, and carriage load after carriage load of the *dramatis personæ* is set down; and mists of rose and white and grey muslins float about the rooms. Then before a thaw has set in, does the young Englishman behave

as though frozen to his seat, or to some wall of the room; any pretence at being at his ease utterly forsakes him; his arms and hands seem impertinent excrescences; horrible dumbness comes upon him, and bashfulness overwhelms him, and he is bitterly conscious of looking exceeding foolish just where and when he most wished to appear at his wittiest and best. Alas! that when he *has* got rid of the dreadful consciousness of superabundance of limb, and has thawed from constraint and dumbness into ease and eloquence in the sunny presence and under the arch eyes—alas, that then the delightful evening has drawn near to its end! And the painful consciousness lies in the heart, after the elation of putting on the cloak and handing his Queen into the carriage, that the delicious familiar footing will have given place to frigid awkwardness again by the next time that the amused girl and the self-hating youth shall meet.

But the games go on, and in the excitement of Blind-man's-buff, or, "How, when, and where," or, may be, a country or other dance that has been got up, the young people are soon at home with each other, and ready for the great event of the evening, which comes early, for very many of the party are tiny children. And undoubtedly for them this great event of the evening is the throwing open the doors of the room where tea or supper is set out in glittering array—jellies trembling in every limb at the coming sack of the city, blancmanges with all trace of colour fled from their cheeks, piles of noble oranges, lofty architectural sponge-cakes (to be cut at the foundation), flat and luscious figs, large fleshy black plums with a white frost about them, preserved cherries, yea, plates of rough candied fruits, greengages, apricots, angelica; heaps of crackers everywhere; above all, a simply sublime Twelfth-cake.

So far as the present writer is concerned, the time has long since passed when inclination and digestion went hand-in-hand to commend the consumption of that swart and heavy compound ; rich deep mould, it seems, when you dig into it, underlying the stratum of thick snow at the top. Still, however, it pleases him much to contemplate the spectacle of a shop-full of these cakes. The pure white covering ; why, when we were young, were we restrained from the tempting morsel, it being represented to us as composed of chalk ? It is, maturer years reveal, but a harmless compound of sugar, drifted sugar, and white of egg. Then, the divers-hued fringes of papers which fence in the domain, and which afterwards serve as a crown for the (child) King and Queen. The ornaments, again represented to us (a representation whose truth experience endorsed) as, in many instances, uneatable, but very fascinating to the juvenile mind. Ringlets of pink and green citron dividing the white surface into segments. In the old time, flat painted chalk houses, birds, sailors, castles, cows, what not ? but in later times semi-opaque sweetmeats filled with liqueur. Birds or butterflies trembling on spiral wire, over nests of flowers ; slabs of pink or dull-white sugar in crimson or sapphire or amber gelatine envelopes ; towering above all, the grandeur of the middle ornament ! In extreme cases, a Parian statuette ; but this is rather an innovation. A choice box of sweetmeats, surmounted by Father Christmas, or some other coloured figure—this seems the more ancient and orthodox adornment. What an event it used to be to us children, as doubtless it is to many others now, to find the year's array of cakes set out at the corner shop, at (with us) Hassell's, the village confectioner, and to wonder which of them all would fall to our lot, sent by that beneficent friend whose delight it was to keep

us almost weekly supplied with good things and toys ! Rarely does such a benefactress, as was that kind lady, fall to the lot of the small commonwealth of the schoolroom and nursery.

Well, the Twelfth-cake this evening proves to be all that could be desired, and already many a bright eye has longingly scanned the noble centre-piece, which, of old custom, falls to the portion of the Queen of the evening. Who will this be ? Ah, who ? It is not only the quite children whose hearts beat eagerly at the question. For if, oh if only Ethel *should* prove to be Queen, and then if Edgar *could* but draw the character of King, why then, you see, there are certain kingly privileges, and Edgar is now thoroughly thawed, and he feels equal to the occasion. However, the thrilling moment comes, the smooth slips and the crinkled slips are handed round ; those who, spite of orders, surreptitiously peep at their fate or fortune, are rewarded by just disappointment. At last the word is given, and eager fingers are at work. Had no one drawn the Queen ? But here one catches Ethel's look, smiling and demure, with colour a little heightened ; "O, Ethel is Queen—Ethel is Queen !" and she holds up her magic lot. Who has drawn the King, then ? For a moment they are on a wrong scent, and Harold is proclaimed as monarch. But Edgar, with sparkling eyes, flushed face, heart violently thumping his white waistcoat, with triumphant look exhibits his credentials, and extinguishes his rival. 'Tis Ethel's turn to look shy now ; she tries to abdicate her sovereignty on behalf of a youngling of nine years, but the united voice of her subjects compels her to retain her honours. How Edgar's heart had died down for a moment ! But now his hour of triumph has come ; Mistress Ethel cannot stand against the law of her kingdom, and the clamour of

her subjects ; the King also has gained courage which surprises himself ; she leans towards *him*—half frowning, half laughing, all blushing, and—yes, incredible and ecstatic delight—their lips meet !

What a moment ! followed by what an evening ! Not much sleep for either Harold or Edgar that night, for certain. Nay this absurdity is, you may be sure, the fact—that the little enthusiast will, for at least the next day, carefully avoid washing the lips which were so ravishingly honoured. “Little fools,” do you say ? Well, well, I shall not echo your growl. I know myself that the ecstasies and despairs of Edgar’s age are at the time real things enough. True, these loves will come to nothing. True, they are, as we saw, unset blossoms, if even so much as this. But, for all that, I tell you that the memory of that evening will always, even into old age, be dear to the man who has at all kept the child’s heart, without which maturity is decay. And, pish and pshaw it as you will, I aver that the triumph and the nectar of that boy and girl’s kiss will, for him, ever be one of the sweetest and choicest of the refectations with which memory will spread the table on her gala days. I might, (for it is rather a favourite theme with me,) say more about child-love. However, the subject shall stand over now, and give place to other incidents of the evening.

The crackers ! We must not, while we are trifling away ten minutes with visiting these ghosts of those old selves, and the innocent follies of old child-days, forget the fun and the earnest of these. The nervousness about the pull, the miss-fire, the sharp crack, the unwieldy bonbon—and just the right motto, no doubt, for Ethel wont show it. However, Edgar finds means, in the course of the evening, to get a peep at it—and to improve the occasion. Here, again, let me parenthesize. Since the amusement is

pretty general, some more aptness, wit, and elegance might well be applied to the composition of these mottoes. At present the best that I can recall is one suggested in the pages of "Punch :—"

"Accept these beauteous lumps of chalk and paint,
And eat them if you're silly.—Which you ain't !"

It is well, let me here suggest, to transfer also to the kitchen the festivities of the evening. Truly, often masters and mistresses are not careful enough to consider that below stairs there are the same capacities of enjoyment, the same needs for it ; nor heedful to make the whole household one family as far as possible. There are some admirable remarks on this subject in "Companions of my Solitude." *Our* old home-custom was ever to cut a goodly wedge of the cake, not forgetting to add some gleanings of the ornaments, and to crown sundry beakers with wine, and presently, collecting a sufficiency of the Characters, to summon the smiling maid to take the whole to the kitchen. Unless it were a regular party upstairs, we children used to steal down also, and enjoy a repetition of the excitement as to who should gain the Royal dignity.

Indeed, I have by me a cutting which may be worth giving as a record of the innocent mirth of more old-fashioned times—times more simple and less prim, genial to remember, if not wholly advisable to emulate :—

"Yes" (an old friend and Uncle wrote to me) "yes, I recognised our juvenile reminiscences in your paper. Our dear niece and you were very tiny things on one occasion at Great Russell Street, when *she* declared—seeing the dining-room table glorious with toys and dolls and coins—'*I never can be so happy again !*' dancing round the board with delight. And do you remember, on Twelfth-night, all you children assembled when we drew characters, how (good, dear Aunt

Mary not taking precautions) *I drew King*, the very pretty nursemaid chancing to get *Queen*—when, with a shout most joyous, to Aunt Mary's dismay, *you all* bore me along in triumph upstairs to my partner, who rose to receive her regal lord ; and how, overcoming my constitutional reluctance, I did kingly homage to her sweet, queenly fair cheek ? Well, these were the merry days of yore." •

Ah, fie ! grave and revered sir ! Yet you plead that you were the creature of circumstances ; so we will not be over hard on you.

Well, it is time that this, perhaps too lightly freighted train of reminiscent musings should draw up to its terminus. Let me put on the break, and gradually bring it to a standstill beside the platform, that the passengers whom it has borne for a half-hour's journey may emerge from it, and disperse to their grave employments. But as we slacken speed, and you gather your books and parcels, let me remember a saying of Disraeli, the Adaptable. He happens to be, in this instance, toying with the Conservative mood. Accordingly, contemplating the spirit of the day, the spirit which would, out of mere wantonness—not pausing to ask whether they were obstructive, or, on the contrary, well-placed, useful, ornamental—pluck up and root out venerable and far-spreading trees, for the sole reason that our Forefathers had planted them, and that they had struck their roots deep into our soil—contemplating, I say, and deprecating this spirit, he reminds Englishmen that, " notwithstanding the rapid changes in which we live, and the numerous improvements and alterations which we anticipate, *this country is still Old England*, and the Past is one of the elements of our power."

And I really think that the keeping up of innocent and genial old customs has its place in this wholesome

conservatism which vainly now-a-days tries to stem the torrent of rabid novelty, headlong change, sudden uprooting of old things. The "Delirium Tremens" newspaper, the "Pell-mell Gazette," Reviews, also, whose name well indicates the truth that their vision, both prospective and retrospective, is included within the bound of a Fortnight—well, they have still some old institutions to clear away, some work of uprooting to urge on a willing Senate. For, so far as I have seen, they have not *yet* started the proposal to borrow a custom from the East, and to kill off our grandfathers, as well as murdering all that is of the almost sacred past. Ah! Cyril, my boy, you *may* live to see England a Republic, and an inroad of "all denominations" breaking into her ancient churches, as now they *have* crept into public toasts. Nay, since everybody knows, now-a-days, that a Church—having, of course, no essence, but being only a jumble of accidents—is makeable or destroyable at the sole fiat of a Parliament of, it might be, Romanists and Dissenters, Infidels and Jews, you may, if the tide turns that way, live to see Mormonism the "Established Church" of the land. For the Law of the Land is, so people will tell you, paramount; and, indeed, the ultimate Tribunal to which is to be brought the Truth of God, and the order of His Church. I conceive it possible, however, that our Branch of the Catholic Church (whose Establishment is, I would suggest, rather an accident, than a thing essential to its mission in these Islands) may find it necessary to make a stand somewhere. Possibly there might be a difficulty (but recent events stagger me) in persuading her members to accede to the modest proposal to arrange a bench of bishops composed of the seven Essayists (but two of them are dead, and one a layman), and a few more such selections. Strange things we see every day; stranger sights are, I daresay, in store for the

rising generation, but I, at least, am too old-fashioned for them. I prefer solid, settled *terra firma* to a series of incessant "leaps in the dark," and (except in cases of a flagrant abuse) that which has been proved, to crude experiment. I seem, however, to have brought my train of musings to an end with a shrill whistle—with a scroop and a creak.

Well, it is difficult to be patient with everything, to acquiesce in everything, in this day of "improvements;" I shall, however, venture to be heretical enough to cling to old customs, ay, and old beliefs, none the less dearly and closely that they *are* old. And even the light spray of life which I have been describing shall be confessed to owe half its dearness and delight in memory to its connexion with "Auld lang syne."





No. XIII.

COLLEGE FRIENDS.

I HAVE but a flower or two to gather for the completion of my handful of Poppies. Indeed, since I began to pick them, two summer loads of the bright scarlet flowers have been carted away: two poppy harvests have been reaped and garnered. Garnered? Ay—but only by the warm winds that passed over their multitudes, fluttering the lances of the corn, and, while the spears bowed all one way to rise again in a stately swaying when the impetuous air had passed by, behold, the brown land between the stalks was paved with the flakes of crumpled scarlet. Lightly come and lightly gone, frail petals that gave pleasure for an hour, and then the wind waisted them off, or, in the serene heat of the July afternoon, they loosed their light hold, and who remembers them any more for ever? So with these unsubstantial, idle annals of glad hours that long ago bloomed their brief while, attained the zenith of their brightness, and then passed. Passed quite away, except for a petal or two treasured between the leaves of the book of memory, and looked at now and then in a leisure half hour. Petals that in these pages are indeed brought out, and arranged in a rude representation of the old live blaze of colour and motion, but only, it may be, to be glanced over by half-indifferent eyes, and then left to flutter away again into disorder and forgetfulness. Much like those oracles which the Sybil used to

arrange, written all on light leaves, stirred and disarranged by the least rustling wind. They served their purpose, told their tale, and then the breezes might have them at their pleasure. So with these reminiscences, put together with some pains, lightly read, however, and lightly dismissed. Pursue we, nevertheless, our gathering, even though, at the end of it, the gay posy be cast into the dust to die.

College Days and College Friends. Surely these should have a place amongst any bringing together of glad hours out of the sober years. Glad hours? Ah! looking back upon them, that whole Three years seems as it were a field of flowers. No doubt it was not altogether so; and much grave work and many thorny anxieties really mingled with the brightness and gaiety of those light-hearted days of life. No doubt the scarlet tinge that seems to colour the whole hill-side comes from that distant side-view that brings or seems to bring into one sheet blooms that, however growing closer together than perhaps at any other time of life, were yet stragglers;—single spies, and, it may be, battalions: yet with tracts between of serious growth, of barren land.

Still, still,—how (to one looking back) the old days, the old Oxford days,—how they seem to laugh out of all the graver acreage with the illusion of being one great sheet of flowers! We forget the weary working through the day, and far into the night; the manful resistance, time and again, to the seductive band of bronzed and flannelled men that burst on some warm morning into the room, bent on recruiting for a scratch game at Cowley, an Eight down to Nuneham. We remember not the overmastering anxiety as the time drew nearer and nearer for that awful half-hour in the School Quad, before the door shall open, and crowding men hurry in, white-tied

and lily-livered, eager to be sitting at last face to face with the worst. We but faintly recall the dreadful suspense that some of us endured until (as the case may be) the Class-List was out, or the solitary room entered and the scarcely hoped-for but gaspingly-welcomed slip of paper brought—magic slip, changing in a moment the hues of the landscape of the mind. All this is forgotten; "the very Schools appear to smile," as we stand upon some hill-top of life, and shading our eyes with our hand, look back upon those pleasant "days that are no more," the peaceful days that lie below us in the valley. The days when we were not soldiers, nor lawyers, nor treasury clerks, nor anxious curates, but simply "Oxford men." The days when love's young dream, and its fascinating uncertainty, and tempting newness made life a kind of unreal fairy-land for us. And our brows were not knit with anxious thought at finding how Noel and Alban and Eric all want new coats and trousers and shirts and boots, and will soon have to be sent to school. And how Violet and Daisy and Lily and Rose must have new best frocks, "for the children are really not fit to be seen, if they should be asked out anywhere."

But in the Oxford days we were of those provided for, and not of the providers. What need we had of "cutting the coat according to the cloth," applied not to the necessities, but to the luxuries of life. And if (which is by far the best training for a young man) the ingenuity had to be directed rather to the problem of *what we could do without*, than of *what we wished to have*—why surely there was little hardship in this. Cosy provision of bed and board, many a not too-expensive mode of enjoyment; society from which, if really the best, a slender purse never excludes a man; delightful alternation of joyous Vacations and happy Terms, Flying Terms, we might well esteem them; flying

fast, even when we had a share in them ;—all fled now.

Oh, yes ! what life like the Oxford life, for freedom from care (if but the coming Schools have had their due), for lightness of heart, for enjoyment of friendship ? “ I envy you,” said a man in life’s prime, to me going up new to Oxford. And I could almost say the same to others now. Yet not so really : the feeling is not at all that ugly one of envy, rather it is that of love, of sympathy, with the fine young fellows. So able and willing to enjoy life, gathering the flowers in the fields of youth by handfuls, never noting (so thickly do they grow) how the petals detach themselves and flutter earthward still as the flowers are picked. Gather your handfuls of the new flowers, I would say, with all my heart ; enjoy keenly, vividly, appreciatively, the glad and merry Oxford months. Only go up with a grave determination (not, however, leaning on the broken reed of your own strength) to do your duty by God and man, both to others and to yourself, to enjoy the innocent gratifications that bend within your reach, letting alone the boughs of forbidden fruit—and how glad those Oxford days may be ! Sweet to enjoy, and sweet to remember ; the very self-denial becoming ere long part of the enjoyment. How different at the time and afterwards, if Guilt and Extravagance were engaged as purveyors of the delights that would have been far more exquisite and truly delicious had they been provided by Innocence and Frugality !

“ Why should we fear youth’s draught of joy,
If pure, would sparkle less ?
Why should the cup the sooner cloy
Which God hath deigned to bless ? ”

Remember, among the new friends, *the old folk at home*: the hearts so anxious (ah, young men, say not over-anxious!) with love that, after all, is *tried*, a thing

which cannot, as yet, be said of the new devotions. Remember also, while you pluck the present gay hour, not to be laying up distresses, perplexities, miseries, for those future years which lie beyond the bright three-years' strip of University life. Gather blithely, "*manibus plenis*," with full hands, the bright flowers ;—but not so as thereafter to strip your life of them. Be happy ! yea, be happy, in this sunny gleam of life ; but make sure that that you are following *is* happiness. For there are mirages in the desert, and it is a bitter thing to come, after eager running, upon nothing but parching tracts of dreary sands, instead of those cool wells and palm trees, which indeed the heart desired, but to which really the back had been turned all the while the deluded pursuit endured.

Well, well, I can find a white hair or two on my head now ; so you shall have listened deferentially to me (with that graceful deference, so winning in young men, refraining from showing impatience) thus far. And now I am minded to retrace my steps, and to lay aside the M.A.—even the B.A. garb ; and to become once more a fluttering-gowned Undergrad. ; to slip off the cares of a parish, and to be simply weighted with the light burden of the next coming examination ; to vacate my curate's house and garden, and to become the proud possessor of "rooms." Rooms in that staircase which was, as it were, a comb with many cells of bees—cells stored with honeyed delights ; combs easily set all a-buzz, you may be sure. Rooms that I even yet grudge to any other possessor. Ah ! what intruding fellow, I wonder, is in them now ? and what work or what merriment is going on there while I am mentally establishing myself and my belongings in our old quarters again ? Nay, the process should be easy ; for I am writing on that very coffee-table which used to

be so often drawn up near the fire from its recess ; and beside me lolls the very easy-chair from which long legs of this or that Oxford friend used often, in the old days, to stretch nearly across the tiny room.

And, moreover, I am minded (for half an hour, I say, no more) to banish that absorbing nursery, and to admit no bonny boy or dainty maid into that inviolable den (how different are things with me now, that the children may be shot into my study for two hours at any time, in the very midst, may be, of busy writing or close reading ;—for two hours, represented under the wretched fallacy of “a minute or two ;”—and I not to dare to leave them or to complain !) ; I am minded to spirit away for the hour, the smooth young brow, and the “lip’s young red, and the hair’s young gold :”—and to stand free of the extra carefulness, free also of the far more exceeding joys which they have brought me, in their invasion of my home and of my heart.

And the *placens uxor* shall be the wilful, teasing girl of those days, making life a delicious worry. And the clerical hat shall be the straw with the college ribbon about it. And the grave array of Tertullian and Chrysostom, of Jeremy Taylor and Andrews, of Hooker the Judicious, of Waterland, Sanderson, and Bull,—give place to the shades of Homer and Cicero, of Tacitus and Aristotle, with always that select shelf in which three green volumes and one purple made up the “Tennyson” of that day ; and into which Wordsworth had lately entered, and Matthew Arnold only just, and Robert Browning was represented then but by the two volumes of “Men and Women.”

And so I am an Undergraduate again. I dare say there are Churchwardens and Parishioners (possibly aggrieved, for some such reason as that they can’t make the poor Parson dress like Old Bogy to preach,

or because order and beauty are taking the place of slovenliness and baldness in Church and services)—I dare say there are such things as these about me. Nay, I suppose I am a Parishioner myself. But little am I concerned with these perturbing matters: Easter Vestries have for me no terror; sexton, clerk, and ringers are, in this my hypothetical freedom, no anxiety to my mind, nor do I wince under the grave disapprobation of those severely impracticable Parishioners who possess the intolerable grievance of being compelled to let the clergyman decide concerning moot points in conducting the service, instead of themselves being requested to arrange all those matters,—irrespective perhaps also of the wishes of a majority in the Parish,—after their own tastes and imaginings.

All these things have, for this hour of uncurbed fancy, nothing to do with me. I am an Undergraduate again; nay, a Freshman; and this is,—yes, this is OXFORD; and the dream of many years is at last accomplished—the dream that once seemed hopeless of realization, and to have been quite given up; I am face to face with the grand and venerable City, the Beautiful City of England; yea, she has taken me under her wing, and I am, for the next few years, to be one of her children. All that delight, all that experience, lies before me now,—which is, indeed, now behind me; I have those friendships to begin,—which, in truth, were old friendships long time ago: I have those studies to resume,—which, also, as a fact, have some time back nearly passed out of my head again. I have come up to Oxford later in life than is usual; but only, I think, therefore more appreciative of everything there, the work, the play; above all, the *life* at Oxford; the life as a whole; the life in its details. The realization, at last, of a hope now for some long time relinquished, causes that even the scarecrow gar-

ment known as the Commoner's gown, is dear to me and proudly worn. No need for injured Proctors to pull me up for draping my arm with it, instead of letting it flutter like a tattered banner, from my back. No fear, for me, of that crushing sarcasm dealt, in such a case, by a well-known Brasenose Proctor : "*I say, young man, the gentleman to whom you are carrying home that gown wouldn't like you to be wearing his cap, you know.*" For my part I loved and love the garb.

From which point did I first see my Dream-City ? Well, it matters little ; for there is no good point of approach to Oxford now. You used to enter, I believe, by the coach, over Magdalene Bridge. And for a long time, as you came, you could see the grey and ancient Towers and Spires appearing out of the rampart of groves and gardens which skirt the city. Green meadows, somewhat flat, stretched about your road, but your absorbed mind was fixed on the stately panorama which opened before you. There was nothing to take your attention away from it ; nothing to jar the harmony with which the mind was ready to enjoy the first visit to the august University. This is not so now. The entrance of which I speak is nearly spoiled by the crowding growth of new red-brick cottages, that has sprung up about the town since the building of the Railway. True, they cannot altogether spoil, although they do greatly mar, the effect of the appearance of Oxford as you approach it for the first time. The tall Towers and Spires look out grandly into the distance, above the ring of upstart little huts, and gather their gardens round them, and fold their feet in their trees.

There you see them ; Magdalene, St. Mary's, Merton ; venerable, grey, and calm. They seem wrapped in their own abstraction from the hurry of our petty life. The noisy trains, the fussy engines, the long

stations, and the mushroom growth that surrounds them,—these trouble them not at all. They look out straight into the distance, and perhaps from their height do not see, at any rate scarcely notice, the impudent and glaringly new pigmy-gathering at their feet. Many, very many years can they count, since their own ancient foundations were laid; and these many years have thus mellowed them, and hushed their new stone into that quiet, delicious, almost solemn grey. As many years as the little red cottages can boast weeks have stepped into light and died away in the shade since these Towers were new.

Winter;—and the snow has picked out their channelled tracery and mossed their pinnacles with perfect white, and danced past them in a drift, and lit on them in a blinding eddying confusion, and died from them in many drips, and passed away before the Spring. Spring;—and ('tis an old, old tale) the year was of course again and again full of grand schemes, and lovely imaginings, and delicate blossom fancies; and the rush of leaves, and the burst of flowers, and the flood of song hardly kept pace with its glow and energy and impulse.

But then the Summer came, and, with it, sobered, quiet thoughts. That wild young ardour which must go on, and on, from the thing which was just attained to the thing which was future yet;—that touching each step in the ascent, hardly to pause for any enjoyment of the opening prospect, but merely to gain a fresh spring for the next;—that wild impetuosity, that ever fresh planning, that vehement beginning to carry out the perfected designs, that quick casting them aside for newer schemes, that restless joy in the race, and exultation in the mere gladness of motion and advance;—all this had died away. A check, a sadness,—a calm rather, had come upon the year. Something had been

attained, not all, no doubt, that the first eager onset had designed,—blights, insects, ravages of wind and drought and sorrowful rain had thwarted many a designed perfection—nay, reality had stopped far short of the brave dreams of the young year's ardour. But it had grown older now. If it gave up, somewhat reluctantly, the attainment of those old grand visions, it had learned, and laid to heart the lesson, that their fulfilment is forbidden to Earth. And *something* had been attained: something of beauty; something of usefulness;—and, be it noted, thoughts of the *useful* were gradually edging into the mature year's mind, where only a wild profusion of blossom and beauty had been wont to crowd. And the year was content, in its Summer, to rest and abide in what had been done and won. There might dwell a hush over it. Something of a sighing might whisper among the full heavy foliage in the summer evenings, at the missing that old wild, headlong joyfulness. But the Year's regard passed away again from the faded blossoms to the maturing fruits, and the sadness became little more than becoming gravity, and the quiet only that of retrospective contemplation. And so the Summer passed by.

And Autumn came, while the ancient Buildings looked on unchanged. And now indeed "an overmastering graveness rose, and the fields and trees seemed thoughtful in their absolute repose." The summit had been gained. And after a pause full of omen, the decline had come. The old Towers could well have foretold this, but they knew, by experience, that the young year would never have believed them; or they held their peace, not in contempt, but in a loving forbearance. The fruit and the harvest were gathered in, and, in the fuller leisure of later life, some return of the old yearning after more beauty came upon the year in its decline. Rich colours it tried now for the old delicate tints. The grey time-worn turrets

were dressed in gorgeous scarfing of scarlet and madder and rose. The late Year even began to essay some timid return of frail profitless blossom here and there. But a cry arose of Winter coming, and it cast down its garlands just when begun.

Yet some beauty still was found ; for—

“ When the fogs had passed away,
The wide lands came glittering forward in a fresh and strange
array ;
Naked trees had got snow-foliage, soft, and feathery, and
bright,
And the earth looked dressed for heaven in its spiritual white.”

Oh, if it might be even thus for every one of us, when the Spring's rush of life is over, and the Summer's grave earnest has given place to the tender sadness of Autumn. And this again to the pallor and sleep of Winter's Death !

But now, what have the four seasons to do specially with Oxford buildings and Oxford days ? I don't know ; they properly belong to *Thomson*, no doubt. But I was thinking of the changes which those grave old Towers have seen. And perhaps I was thinking more of the life of man on which they had looked down, and of those eager Spring feelings which in the younger denizens of the grave old buildings are so ardent and irrepressible. And of how much less of achievement we settle down upon in our mature years than our glowing thoughts had designed in the exuberance of life in those old generous days. So many blossoms there were ; nay, it was a certainty that they could not all set, and it is something if not all were abortive. And if, now Summer is passing, and Autumn here, and Winter hard by, there be *something* to show at life's end, for all that gay promise at its beginning.

Watch on, ancient Towers of Oxford, over the up-start red-brick pigmy growth at your feet : watch on, like a true and wise Conservatism over a spurious and

false (so called) Liberalism ! Watch on ! We live in an age of change—an age when with some minds it is a sufficient plea for the destruction and removal of old and tried fabrics, to urge that they *are* venerable, ancient, proved. Down with the grey stones and the lichen-starred walls of Oxford, and up with the new brick and plaster !

And so let us help on the glorious day when our grand Old England shall become a vile copy, on a smaller scale, of Young America. Let us help on the day when, the "Education of the world" having been completed, and the Bible kicked after the Prayer Book out of the domains of Education, and the parish Churches turned into Lecture-halls upon matters of "science, falsely so called ;" and the College-chapels into gymnasiums for the pursuit of muscular Christianity ;—and a stopper having been thus effectually placed on Popery and Puseyism (the two alone evils of our day) :—the golden age of man may at last commence, and the gates of a certain Dominion appear to have prevailed against a certain Institution. Yet it is decreed that they shall prevail never. Words are ringing in my ears that seem curiously àpropos to this train of musing and to the statesmanship of the day : "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws, and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

But I have stood in a brown study too long upon Magdalene Bridge. Let me pass on, lingering at my favourite points in the glorious High Street ; looking, in my matriculationship, with reverence at any man in academicals ; prudently crossing the road to avoid a man with a huge black cheese-cutter on his head, who *may* be, for aught I know, the Vice-Chancellor, but who is, I afterwards ascertain, a Bedell. Let me catch, as I walk to my brother's rooms, the charm for the first time of that jangled harmony of bells, tings, and clangs, and clongs ; as though the air were full of bell-notes that had left their hive, and were swarming. But first the tall straight Tower of New College grows disturbed and anxious in its mind, and anon two bells, after a little hesitation, alternate clearly and sharply ; the Cathedral, awakened by the challenge, replies in a minor key, and deep-voiced Magdalene makes mellow answer from her sentinel Tower, while a clamorous following arises of well-meaning little bells from other Colleges that try to assert themselves, but hardly reach the sublime by contrast with the dispassionate calmness and melancholy sweetness of the tall Warders of the City. For a quarter of an hour these speak and reply, and ere they return to their meditative belfry silence, I have passed, with the white-robed procession, into exquisite Magdalene Chapel.

The dim quiet light ; the rich carven oak, rimmed with crimson cushions, and dark against the white garb of the boy choristers ; the tapers that studded the hushed, mellow gloom, and that spread their influence in a misty gold glow throughout it, just indicating, in the roof where the dimness loved to linger, the stone ribs that overlaced it ; the deep, long, sonorous " A—men !" of the choristers, that fell, as the fall of a long-poised wave, when the sustained voice of the prayer ceased ; and, upon all these, the mighty burst,—

as of a forest's roar, sinking into low liquid flute-notes, as from a hid bird in its shade—of the superb organ; all these, making one indescribable whole, and rendered by associations and the long unhopèd-for attainment of a life-desire, intensely fascinating to me;—were well-nigh too much for my stoicism. Then came the Anthem, "*Great God! what do I see and hear?*" and out of the harsh brazen crash of the "trumpet sound" slid out the sweetness of the boy-voices, clear as the ring of the descended hammer amid the fierce uproar of the forge. Whereupon a strange mist gathers across the eyes, and a sudden choking starts up in the throat.

Ah, well! it is one of the things—I am free to confess that there are many—which I cannot understand; the repugnance which the English mind is so long in overcoming towards beauty in the services of the Church. It is not as though they did not appreciate taste and fitness in the arrangements of their own houses, but, presto, at once beauty, richness, fitting symbol, become an offence in that House, whose comeliness should be the most cared for of any. I am not pleading now the cause of fantastic excess, and hybrid Romanism; but that of simple beauty and fitness; ay, and, where desired, even of a certain richness and gorgeousness of ritual. But it is (or was, the absurdity has much died out) almost funny to hear it said (as I have really heard it said), that God's sweet flowers were out of place in a "Protestant" church; and to find a parish in an uproar because the clergyman appeared to preach his sermon, habited in exactly the same garb which he had been wearing, with no offence given, during all the rest of the service. It is, I say, almost funny to be told that it is Popish for the choir to wear white-robcs, most like the choirs (we seem to gather) in Heaven. Or that the very same hymn may

become Romish if we sing it walking, which was staunch Protestant so long as we stood still to sing it. Yet these curious things are, or have been, said or shrieked at some much-enduring parish priests.

Poor men ! it never seems to strike our grave and virtuous Censors of the Press—in those interesting Articles (I nearly forgot the big A !) in which our duties are so kindly mapped out for us, our shortcomings severely commented upon, our obligations set forth with admirable simplicity (for they appear merely to consist in the adapting everything to the taste of everybody in the parish, excepting to our own),—it never seems to strike these astute layers down of the law, that the Clergy are to have any tastes, feelings, preferences, at all, or any good reason for possessing these, supposing that they have them. One of the brightest ideas, gravely treated with approval (as a step in the right direction) in a *Times* Leader, which yet, at the same time, showed up the absolute absurdity of the notion ;—one of the brightest of these ideas was that which had dawned into a certain clergyman's head—all in a fine frenzy with the laity-worship of the day, or else brimming over with the impulse of a practical joke. He proposes a plan by which a committee of laymen should control and regulate the manner of conducting the church services in each parish ; but that all *they* proposed might be veto'd by the clergyman, all *he* wished, stopped by the laymen ; and (should these happen to agree), the result of the deliberations of both, extinguished by the Bishop ! At least thus the *Times* made it out.

Poor parish priest ! we often hear talk of that “monstrum horrendum, &c., cui lumen ademptum,”—the Aggrieved Parishioner (does not every priest's heart quail as, “to the mind's eye, Horatio,” he stands before him ?) ; but who ever heard a word said about the

aggrieved (with a small a), the aggrieved parson? It seems to me that a book might be written, very pathetic and moving, concerning the pains and penalties that he hath patiently and uncomplainingly to endure, especially if it fall to his lot to have first to stir up the mud of a place stagnant for some sixty years. Truly he will soon be in bad odour.

Nay, list the pathetic tale! I once heard of a worthy man who had to undergo an attack of small-pox, thereby melting the heart of his really kindly, but *ready-to-be-aggrieved*, parishioners—before he dared put his choir into surplices. When he was getting better (his wife informed me), “he thought the people would be sorry for him, and not like to object,” so he carried out his wish. I own I was tickled at the idea: I found myself calculating what it would take—Asiatic cholera at the least, I concluded—to make them submit to vestments and incense, if he should take a turn that way.

Poor parish priest! I repeat. But be it understood that I am not advocating the cause of those dishonest men (they are, I believe, not a numerous band), who, really and avowedly, holding all or nearly all of the doctrine of a Church against whose errors the Church of England has plainly declared, yet remain in her Communion as shepherds of her flock, with the avowed intention of betraying her. I cannot see why Rome should necessarily have all the beauty with her erroneous teaching, and England the baldness and the ugliness *because* she holds a purer faith. Of course if it came to this, that purity in doctrine were incompatible with beauty in externals, nothing more could be said. It is just this position, however, that I emphatically deny. I remember having it told me, with some triumph on the part of the narrator, that Mr. Meanwell, on being asked his opinion of certain rich work contemplated

in a church in which his son was to officiate, had exclaimed, "I mean the ornament of *my son's* church to be the Gospel!" I could not help mentally asking, Why, in either case, should one of these beautiful things necessarily shut out the other? Why should not that which is certainly the principal, accept the aid of that which might be made accessory?

Nor, when I advocate divers improvements above the category of absolute decencies—improvements that are luxuries, rather; matters of *preference*, but not matters of *principle*—would I speak a word for the blind folly that would force upon an uneducated parish things, desirable, it may be, but indifferent, to the overturning of things of far greater importance. The spiritual interests of the people are of greater moment, undoubtedly, than the introduction of a surpliced choir. On the other hand, some may urge (and truly) that, in its degree, a surpliced choir might help towards these deeper interests, assisting reverence, making the service heartier, more attractive. And that if we must venture on no improvement before all are agreed to accept it, the state of our churches fifty years ago must have been stereotyped. And that you can't make omelettes without breaking eggs.

Where was I? Ah, yes,—at Oxford: and in Magdalene Chapel. I seem to have been, as Bunyan has it, in a muse. Recovering myself, I find the service over now. The last "A—men!" has left the lily-carven oak stalls, and fled to the roof, and the choristers, pure-garbed, lead the way, followed by the hoodless Demies, and these by the white-robed Fellows, scarlet-hooded. Then the visitors linger or follow; and at last we group in the ante-chapel;—best for our hearing the out-voluntary;—and the tall

shafts of the straight columns rise up, splitting into long veins over the roof; and the organtide is let loose among us.

On it comes, shaping its volume into the "Hallelujah Chorus;" flooding us in the dim light;—surprised Fellows, dark-robed strangers—ladies, azure or crimson clad;—and the scene, and the associations, and the Master's masterpiece, so sublimely given; now shattering into dispersed "Hallelujahs!" now gathering its might together; now sinking into an angel's solo of rest's acme, thence passing away with ranked voices, as it seemed, from different angel-clusters uniting at the close;—all this was a thing to hear, to witness, if but once; and never thereafter to forget.

But in the Chapel the lights went out, one by one, beneath the surly janitor's hand; and while I watched these falling stars, the music sank to low tide, leaving the sands of silence bare. And we streamed out of the narrow chapel door, into the High, under the elms again.

Whither shall I wend me next, in these semi-detached Oxford reminiscences? To my favourite Magdalene walk? to familiar Christ Church meadows? to the sedate Groves of St. John's?

Nay, best follow the ancient custom and regular sequence of the place, and, after Chapel, wend my way by lanes, and through two grey venerable Quads, to that brother's rooms, who, waxing a little impatient, is expecting me to fulfil my engagement and come with him to dine in Hall.

He is capped and gowned as I enter, and we—Do I bore you, amiable reader? Nay, if your University career be yet future, even the mildest platitudes concerning it will find you breathlessly interested; and

if they be of the past, still more will the tamest pen be gifted to recall the golden days. If thou beest of the Enemy,—of the party unsympathetic with the genius of the place ; of the party which I may be allowed (being prejudiced), to describe as *radically* wrong,—pass on at once to “the next article,”

“Nor lose ten tickings of thy watch
O’er this unprofitable page !”

Oh, the dinner in Hall ! and the rows of men rising for the Grace ; the High table, and the Bachelor’s table, and the Commons,—to which the men are very Oliver Cromwells, quickly compelling their disappearance ;—the novelty of it all ; the fun of it all ; so unlike any other condition of things in the whole wide world. The freedom, the strangeness, the delight ! Then for an hour or so of chat, and to take a glass of wine in some man’s rooms ; two or three to meet us ; not this a regular “*Wine*”—the gathering unlike any ordinary party, surely ; men with caps worn, smoking, chaffing,—in this case, innocently merry ; *O si*—:

But the evening had waned, and we had wandered back into my brother’s own rooms. He had drawn for me near to the fire the heavy easy-chair ; he was busy concocting tea,—had called across the road, spite of my protestations, for some toast from the confectioner’s, and had opened one of those long boxes of Huntley and Palmer’s *Reading* biscuits, in which the different species are so neatly arranged in their several departments. But while he thus busied himself, on hospitable thoughts intent, I had a yearning for another peep at the dear old City, and so strolled out into the air.

It was into a back Quad.—a queer, twisty, out-of-the-way place,—but the porch of my brother’s staircase

commanded a view of an old gabled part of the College. The moon was up, and nearly full, and threw the peaked shadows towards me.

The cool hallowed grey was darker and deeper than in the daylight: the sky, made pale by the moon, was speechful with glitter of stars rare or clustered in the tranquil blue, and, as ever, harmonized most perfectly with the old dark stone. Here and there, in some kindly room, the bright transparency of a crimson curtain, lit to jewel-glow by fire or lamp within, rich in colour as the heart of a carbuncle, gave a new treat to the eye, that yet, without it, might well have rested content with the holy grey, deepening into serene blue, and this flecked with snow-fall of stars.

And I leant against the wall, and mused, and fancied myself in rooms of my own (I had come up to matriculate;) and what and where they would be, and with what neighbours, strangers to me as yet; and determined that crimson curtains should glow from the window, and add a beauty to Oxford streets at night. For I hold that all, be it in house-building, tree-planting, doing anything in which the eyes of the public are concerned, lose a privilege and fail in an obligation, if they omit to contribute their mite of beauty—be it even *but* a mite—to the wandering passing and repassing unknown world without.

I yet lingered, leaning against the wall, and found myself spinning webs of fancy as to the inmates of the lit rooms. Now and then a clatter of tables beaten, or a confusion of voices, and into the quiet night burst the noise

“Of songs, and clapping hands, and boys,
That crash'd the glass and beat the floor.”

And I wandered away in thought to the far-distant homes connected with each room; and called up to

mind the aspirations, and hopes, and fears linked with these young fellows ; and mused as to their probable fulfilment, or disappointment. I seemed at last almost to see, fluttering against the windows before leaving earth, the dove-winged prayers that were continually soaring from Mother's lips and Father's heart, on behalf of the darling boy who had so long been carefully, if not always wisely, tended and guarded, but who now was launched into a position of self-responsibility,—often the beginning of a made or marred life. And I seemed to gather the burden of what these prayers should be,—coming to me in echoes from an old beseeching of love—“*I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil.*” And to this prayer, my heart, tender with its train of thought, answered with an earnest “Amen.”

Well, I was called in to tea, I suppose,—but the day of which I write is “long time ago,” now. I remember that we strolled out, before “Tom” went down, to the “Parks,”—grand name to the uninitiated, but at that time, only a turnip-field a mile in circuit, about which (like marbles in some child's game) reading men spin for a walk, and boating men for a “grind.”

A misty rain falling now : but we cared little for this, and were soon engaged in earnest converse, which made our feet fly fast round the space. The stars, watery-eyed, looked out now and then, blurred soon by the thin cloud-veil, and the dim moon made cold steel-gleams lie on the projections of the towers and spires.

A melody, too soft to be sudden, stole, from eight bells, out of St. Giles' belfrey, across the gardens, and found its way to appreciative hearts. The wind played with it, as a cat with a mouse,—now letting it escape

quite across to us, anon, with a pounce, snatching it back,—to escape again, and for so long that you thought it had got clear away, until, lo! the sudden paw was laid upon it once more.

Dear old Oxford! I have not, as I intended to have done, called up the actors, but have contented myself with standing here and there about the old scenery. Delicious, yet melancholy occupation! Other tenants now occupy the rooms where this and that friend used to welcome me. Even my own little snuggerly would repudiate me if I essayed to return to it. And perhaps it is not until one stands in the familiar streets again, after a few years have swept away every vestige of the old dear companions, that one positively realizes how utterly and for ever they are gone from our life,—the glorious old Oxford days.





NO. XIV.

COLLEGE FRIENDS.—PART II.

COLLEGE friends. Yes, I must people the old walls, and not leave the Beautiful City in the loneliness of her Vacation days ; a shell without the mollusk. To what purpose should I have called up the venerable buildings, the noble streets, the Towers and Spires, and summoned before memory the scenery ; if I should leave Oxford then a lovely lifeless stage, naked of the persons of the drama ? The short drama ; a piece in three acts : three years, and three examinations conclude it. And then the curtain falls, let us hope, not without some moderate applause. Applause that may be counted on at least from the home circle, and the choice band of friends. There is, for them, always something to praise. You obtained an honorary Fourth ; or the Examiner thanked you ;—or looked as though he would have *liked* to thank you, only (no doubt) he felt bashful. Applause sure to be given, where this is anyhow possible. Sometimes, alas ! instead, a sad, rebuking silence. Sometimes (ah, rarely, at least, from the kind home-hearts) hissing, execration.

How delightful, however, to leave the stage as a "well-graced actor." "Not void of righteous self-applause," no doubt. But still more blessed in the proud and happy look of the Father, at the return home of the Graduate son, crowned with blushing honours.—The Father that had so faithfully and self-

denyingly pinched and saved to give his bonny boy a first-rate education; and so to send him into the world well equipped for the battle of life; to send him out a gentleman and a scholar, with the chance (until our Universities shall have been *liberalized* down to infidelity) of being also an earnest believer and an intelligent Churchman. And now his wistful longings, lookings, expectings, have not been disappointed. Heartily could he afford to enjoy the minor triumph of seeing him smiting Cambridge to "leg" and to "off," and far away beside frantic "long-on," at Lord's, or of seeing him stand on the shore, flushed with toil and triumph, stalwart, brave, and lithe, and fit to row another mile yet, when the gallant light-blue had just rowed by, fagged and dejected. Heartily might the appreciative father permit himself to enter into such excitements as these, seeing that they were but preludes to that great day when his trembling hands were opening a letter, outside of which "*All right!*" had been thoughtfully written, and which announced that the young fellow had been placed in the First Class. Oh, the greeting when he came home, with another first added to that—a Double First-class man!

Delightful was it indeed, that long expected and at last arrived moment of the coming out of the list. Glorious that first exhilaration, that hastening to write off the good news just in time for post; those congratulations from the Tutors, and the cheers of the men at the farewell supper. A day it was to be remembered all through life, that day of the B.A. degree. The entering the Schools clad in the wisp of gown which Dons insist on undergraduates wearing in all its undevelopment and scantiness (chiefly—it seems to me after careful research—because the men mostly object to the garment)—the entering the Schools, I say, thus habited, and, after a brief ceremony, emerging to surrender to the obse-

quious scout the tattered fragment which was the badge of the undergraduate, and then to stalk proudly forth into the Oxford streets robed in the full and flowing garb of the Bachelor. Ah yes, this was truly a delightful day! Better far than that forlorn Master's Degree, that comes more than two years after, when all the old faces are away, and never a welcome found lingering in so much as one of the old rooms. There are, you see, for the Bachelor still in residence a goodly number of the old band; and hearty sympathies, and stalwart pats on the back, and vehement bravoes are all at his beck and call. That day was, then, a white day, the day when he became a Graduate of Oxford; when he could look back upon Examinations, small, moderate, and great, as henceforth things of the past. When the B.A. importance was yet a new thing; and all the laurels of the crown fresh and unfaded; and the young success a delight never failing, a thing deliciously to call to mind at first waking in the morning, and at certain luxuriously complacent moments of meditation during the day.

Thus delightful, we shall own, were the sweets of success, while the Term yet lasted, and while he yet stayed up among the band of University friends. But not in the least comparable to the delight of the home greeting. No, no. The anticipation, the delicious musing during that swift hour's speeding from Didcot to London; the arrival, with fluttered heart;—the welcome. Sisters proud and appreciative; brothers admiring and vociferous; the dewy gleam in the Father's eye, his wring of the hand, with but little said.—Only, in the evening, while the cozy party are gathered about the fire, and there has been a few minutes' reflective silence, a simple speech that touches the young man's heart with its pathetic revelation of the depth of the father's grateful pride, "*I wish dear*

**** *was here.*" But the Mother never lived to see her first-born, her darling, even into his teens. Does she look on? Can she know? Does the uttered wish, that, in the hour of his joy, betrays the void in the Father's heart, bring any glow of gladness to her spirit, perceiving that the remembrance of her, the want of her, still, after so long, tarry upon the earth?

However these things be, there can be no doubt about the sweetness of this hour to the hero of the evening. Is it not well repaid, the self-denial (it *was*, I daresay, often, stern self-denial), the hard work, which have resulted in so much happiness, such joy given and received? Ah, he might have had more of enjoyment (falsely so called) had he frittered away his University career in amusement and extravagance. And he might not unlikely have escaped reproach on his return, after hardly getting the bare Degree at last—he might have escaped reproach from the sad-thoughted Father. But now does he not feel that any pains are well paid, while he watches the quiet, thankful joy, too deep for many words, which lights up that Father's face, as he meditatively thrums on the table, looking absorbedly in a tranquil reverie into the glow and dance of the Christmas fire? Ah, *if young men would think!* But they very often will not. How many are even now so living their short University life that in the years to come, often, often, a shade will come over the face at the remembrance of it, and often the vain and sorrowful wish rise from the heart near to the lips, "Ah, how I wish that I had those grand opportunities again!"

It is, to a tender, thoughtful heart, even pathetic to watch for long and to fall into a muse contemplating an assemblage of the young fellows. Fair open faces, fresh young cheeks, their glow of health unquenched; smooth brows, vigorous limbs; and minds in tune with the

health and young life of the body. Richly endowed with that portion of goods which fell to them from the Father's store, but, in too many cases, not contented to enjoy it under His wise and kind direction: no, they must go out and away from that, and squander them in the vain world. Health and joyousness, light heart and innocent mind, energy and fire, impulse and vigour: soon all spent, and nought to show for the spending. Then the famine—then the famine! And, *perhaps*, the return after all. But ah, how much better to have kept at home, and to have saved this harm and loss! To have been forgiven; received without reproach; restored to favour; how sweet, how overwhelming! But ah! how sad, after all! How sad that that should be *forgiveness*, which might have been proud delight.

“ Father, scorned and slighted,
Dost Thou see Thy child?
Life's fair promise blighted
Once that gaily smiled.
Hope and strength and gladness
Spent, all spent and gone,
Dull despair and madness
Claim him for their own.

“ All the joy and laughter
Spent and hushed and dead;
All the deep peace after,
Spent:—for ever fled!
Youth's quick faith and pleasure,
Energy and glow,
All that first rich treasure
Spent:—and nought to show!

“ We, Thy sons, Thine Angels,
We, the elder Host,
We would sing evangels
To the lone and lost;
We, Thy children, Father!
Safe within Thy home;
Therefore yearn the rather
Over those that roam.

"Lo ! a hunger ever
Gnaweth at his soul ;
Earthly banquets never
Can its want control ;
Ah, that want, God-given
Child of the Divine !
Asks the Bread of Heaven,—
Not the food of swine.

"Father, art Thou calling,
Calling home the lost ?
Is Thy sunshine falling
On the winter-frost ?
Father, look upon him,
Wandering and beguiled ;
Thou hast not foregone him,
Still is he Thy child !

"Father ! There is silence,
Deep and still and dread ;
Earnest, eager silence,
Till the word be said :
SAVED ! He is forgiven !—
Million harps should raise,
Pealing through high Heaven,
Ecstasies of praise !"

College friends. Ay, this poemlet comes in *à propos* of my theme. How little I knew, when in my own Freshman's Term I was horrified by the news that the freshman who had taken the next rooms to mine was expecting the arrival of a piano,—how little I knew the delights thence in store for me ! With a cold shudder I anticipated the slow torture of "scales," or of "exercises," or the still more excruciating anguish of helplessly hearing the continual murder of sweet or grand music. But Mendelssohn's and Beethoven's exquisite masterpieces, rendered by subtlest hands, and set forth by a kindred and fully appreciative mind, were, instead, to be my happy portion. Nor (rare marvel ! would that some performers knew *how rare* !) were pieces of my friend's own composing, I soon

found, unworthy even to alternate with these creations. Beethoven's "Sonate Pathétique," and that duet between the bass and treble, one of the "Songs without Words"—were the first dispellers of my fears concerning that piano. How I learned to love them! Nor has my appreciation the least chilled, nor would, did I hear them every night of my life. How perfect that love-poem of Mendelssohn's! How the deeper notes express the strength and sweetness and earnestness of man's character, answering gravely to the trusting, gentle, tender pleading of the soft woman-treble. But none, to my mind, ever renders and interprets Mendelssohn as does that college friend of mine. Save that the gracious empress of my own piano has lovingly indulged me by careful study of the—"trick" would be quite the wrong word—manner, then, of his setting forth the master's music. Rather, however, this consummate playing was simply the result of careful and successful study of the maker's meaning in his work. He could never be persuaded to insult a master by playing over his piece *at sight*. From which respect some over-glib performers might take a lesson.

After a hard day's reading in my maturer Oxford life, just when he divined that my wearied head was laid on the pillow, often he (knowing my fancy) would go to the piano, and soothe my tired senses, and summon rest to my busy mind, and exorcise dark fears concerning the next examination, and banish gnawing crowds of irregular verbs, or perplexing syllogisms, or knotty passages, or tiresome, slippery dates, or subtleties of philosophy, as the case might be. They would lull their weary solicitude, at the potent spell, and I could sink to sleep in an atmosphere of delicious sounds that, as with angel-wings, fanned and cooled my hot and tired brain.

Well, the change-bringing years have passed by, many of them. Even yet, however, I have but to shut my eyes, and behold, I am again in that familiar room, an honoured, and indulged guest, leaning back in the easy-chair. And he sits with his grave face towards the piano, and all the attendant spirits that wait at his beck and obey his summons are making the hour delicious, and dispelling care and anxiety.

But I said that the poemlet, "Father, scorned and slighted," came in *à propos* of my theme of College Friends. I have not, I remember, yet explained how this is so. It was, then, written by this humble pen, for noble music, to which it was married by this very College friend of whom I am writing. It formed a semichorus of Angels, in the oratorio, "The Return of the Prodigal," which was produced at St. James's Hall, in May, 1870.

I remember that when this paper first appeared I spoke of the production of that oratorio as a thing still future, and speculated as to whether any who read the words would hear and recognise them when grandly sung in that May-evening. I wonder whether they did. However that be, let me recall the pleasure and the pride of the time when I sat beside my wife, and near my sister (whose Husband was indeed the Composer), pleased to see the well-filled Hall and palpitatingly expecting the moment when Benedict should give the sign, and the oratorio should begin. Would it be a success? It *must* be, we were assured. Not only our own hearts told us so, but comfortable rumours had reached us, from time to time, of how at the first rehearsal the performers had rapturously cheered and applauded at the end of each number; of how, next day and afterwards, many more volunteers than could be accepted had applied to sing in it; of how the principal vocalists had said that the

opinion in the musical world was that there had been no such music since the "Elijah."

So we listened, wrapt, breathless. The Overture was finely rendered; and then the interest became deeper, more vivid, as the exquisite airs, one after one, though entirely new to the audience (a disadvantage I always think) yet called forth earnest attention and eager applause. The Composer's grave face brightened, however, with pleasure, when the Chorale, "Father, scorned and slighted," of which one College friend had written the music, and another the words, was the first to receive a rapturous encore. Of course it was the *music*,—which one review (the *Morning Post*) characterized as "simply sublime,"—but a little pardonable elation might be allowed to him also who had at least supplied the support about which the graceful flower-growth might twine. The full Chorus, brought in at the middle of the last verse, thrilled most hearts, I fancy, with a sort of electricity.

And so all went well to the end. Has anything, I wonder, of the kind ever been written which might not admit, as its peer, the Duet in the second part, "I am weary?" How exquisitely Madame Patey sang it! Mr. V. Rigby did his best; but, O, to hear Mr. Sims Reeves take that Tenor! It would be almost *too* much.

Did we not share in the "eager and enthusiastic ovation" which followed upon the ceasing of the last chorus? And when the familiar face appeared upon the platform, over the sea of applause, bowing to this side and to that, was it not something that might well make the heart swell with proud pleasure, to be able to say to one and another of the eulogists, "*He was my College Friend?*"

College friends. Thus harmonious are my reminis-

cences of one of these. But, at the word, a cluster of them starts out bright in memory's sky. There is Barton, thin and pale, appreciative of poetry, delighted, when he first came to my rooms, at seeing Tennyson on my shelves. Does he not still often, almost really, enter and take his place, of a morning, on my reclining chair, while I am finishing my breakfast? I have safely landed my egg out of the saucepan, boiled, or (I aspired so far) poached on a piece of toast; my tea is made; a friendly book is perched on its desk by my plate; I have come in from Chapel, and there is, this morning, no lecture for me. Then arrives the well-known tap at the door; appears the familiar sociable face; commences the cosy breakfast chat. Oxford talks seem like no other talks, as Oxford friends are like no other friends. Life seems a grand untried expanse outspread before us, at that time; we are standing on the brink ready for the launch into the buffeting waters, but they do not seem to us, as we stand impatient, exultant there, other than smooth and glittering, or if they do, we glory in the prospect of battling with their fury. All before us, untried, new, exciting (to change our simile); the time—

“When, wide in soul and bold of tongue,
Among the tents we paused and sung,
The distant battle flashed and rung.

“We sung the joyful pæan clear,
And sitting, burnished without fear
The brand, the buckler, and the spear—

“Waiting to strive a happy strife,
To war with falsehood to the knife,
And not to lose the good of life.”

Yes, all lay before us: if a strife, a *happy* strife: not the weary sobbing contest with dogged persistent Evil, the dreadful Inkerman nights and days which grim experience brings to us. So we chatted, so we

hoped. Both, moreover, of course, in love : his love dawning, and he delighting to dwell upon the sweet Present, the ecstatic Future. Ah! and now I bethink me, it is but two years ago that he buried dear wife and only child, and started afresh with a new loneliness of life ; a loneliness perceived now, as it had never been had it not been once interrupted—

“ For a sorrow’s crown of sorrows is remembering happier things.”

—Then, again, both were looking forward to taking Holy Orders. And how bright the prospect! How dear, how delicious the thought of entering soon upon that noblest of work! How wise we would be ; how zealous! What deep Divines : what earnest Parish Priests! There would (we knew of course) be obstacles, difficulties,—nay, if not, what sphere for noble work?—what room for tact, for zeal, for unconquerable patient love? But a bright golden haze veiled and mellowed, with a tender unreality, all that uncertain, dimly-seen future at which we used to gaze so cheerily, so longingly, in those old Oxford days, in those old Oxford rooms. Ah, how different real warfare from anticipated warfare! How different real deeds from picture deeds! How different experience from romance! Yet, although the golden haze, of necessity, lifted from the fields when we entered them and encamped in them, which of us would, had we our choice to make again, for even one half moment reconsider it? Which of us would not, in sadness, reach out his hands even yet more eagerly, for that which we grasped in the joyousness of hopeful inexperience?

Lately, at a dinner-party, I heard the remark made that no one ought to take Holy Orders unless his father or friends were certain to be able to procure him a ‘ Living ’ after a while. How I hate this word, *Living* ;

surely it must be felt that it is a grovelling distinctive name for such a charge as is that of a Cure of souls. I created a smile by the warmth with which I broke in, declaring that if I knew at the outset that my only boy would remain all his life a Curate with 80*l.* a year, I would choose that life for him before the proudest other position the world had to offer. And so I would. We clergymen are to blame for much careless talk, and for appearing to think so much of "Preferment" (hateful word!). It seems too hideous to suppose that reticence, in times and crises that need outspoken speech, *can* ever have anything to do with the thought and expectation of this. That mouths watering for Bishoprics or Deaneries can thus be prevented from pealing forth trumpet utterances that would be *imprudent*. Yet the fear cannot be altogether banished that thus the case sometimes is. And what must the laity think? Are the sneers about the loaves and fishes quite and always undeserved? Oh, vile, and abject condition of things which could justify these sneers! Oh, for a little more of faithful imprudence! Oh for a few more Denison and Burgon spirits! The "cold shade" under which they may lie shall be lifted one day. Then shall they *shine forth as the sun*.

But Barton has finished his weed (he sometimes indulged in that bad habit, not only of smoking, but of smoking in the morning), and I my breakfast. So I start out of the reverie into which I fell while he was studying some examination-papers for "Mods" (which agreeable excitement loomed in our horizon); and leave Thomas to clear my table for work. O those examination-papers!—extinct volcanoes,—does not a thrill come over us as we recall our anxious perusal of them, and markings of this point and that, which had been evidently intended to "stump" the hapless victims of their spent fury? And a cold shudder ran

down the back, as we felt that fresh ones, yet unborn and unguessed at, lurked in the minds of Examiners, to be, one dreadful day, set face to face with ourselves! What pensive moments are those in which, in after-life, we take out of some drawer those magic slips of paper, the four "Testamurs." What memories of confident or anxious waiting; of the joyous step of the friend coming into our room with them! What a pleasant warmth down the back, and kindly self-complacency in the heart, as we receive the congratulations of the men in Hall! What a bright glow seems to light the streets and buildings as we walk out into them.—But how long ago now since all that was over!

Pass we on, however, to other College friends. One, a Professor now at Oxford; then newly a double First-class man of our Hall; a pride for him and for us, his foster-brethren. Not at first a College friend: too much my Senior when I came; too great a man. But he has instituted a Debating society to be held in our dining-hall, and he is to open it with a debate on "Tennyson, whether or no he be worthy the name of a true Poet?"

Barton and I are, need I say? roused men at this. What though he who leads the attack be a Graduate, and a Champion of name, and we but junior and unknown men? If no worthier warrior arise, ourselves shall stand in the gap. And in truth there was little doubt that we should have to do so, for, sooth, to say, at that time, few, in our community, were the students and appreciators of the great poet. However, say what we would, we well knew that the dead-weight of our opponent's opinion would probably suffice to turn the scale against our arguments. Still we would "keep the bridge" against whatever odds. Barton should lead, and I should second the defence.

The evening came: the attack was made; the

poetry itself, and the sentiment of the poetry sharply assailed. Barton replied at great length, interspersing his speech with many quotations, but since these ran much upon the subject of love, to which weakness or strength the speaker was accredited with a strong bias, more merriment was provoked than perhaps was well for the weighing of grave argument. Which, however, was borne with imperturbable good-humour, and much applause followed the sitting down of the Tennysonian champion. The debate was adjourned, on the motion of another of the as-sailants. I was to reply to him.

One's first speech in public!—especially to an Oxford public!—it must be owned to be an anxious matter. Should I stick? Should I break down? For one can have no possible idea of whether the faculty of fluent public speech is in any degree possessed until the ordeal of a trial has been undergone. And many will sympathize in the solicitude with which I looked forward to what was to be my maiden effort.

Behold, however, the anxious evening arrived; the Hall filled with a goodly gathering; even a Master of Arts there—to Undergraduates, a kind of superior being; one of those who “Live and lie reclined on the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind; for they lie beside their nectar, and the clouds are lightly curled.” Well; one of these was of the audience. The adjourner of the debate made a speech *à propos* of nothing; and, upon his sitting down, I found that the inevitable moment had come for me to make my first appearance as a debater.

Perhaps the less said about that oration the soonest mended. Enough to please myself by recalling that, certain kind applause helping me on, I did not, at least, stick fast, or break down. I remember to

this day (our earliest successes or, at least, *non-failures*, have a sweetness about them which no after,—even if really great—success can command), I remember to this day the gratification with which the applause filled my heart, when I had sat down, after some such magnificent peroration as this :—

“ To those who have read this poet, and yet love him not ;—who have, nevertheless, like my opponent, proved themselves to be of first-class—nay, of *Double First-class*—ability” (here the applause was vociferous), “ to these I can only express my regret that they and I should be on opposite sides in this debate.

“ To those who are non-appreciative because they have not read Tennyson—and this is a large class—I will quote the words of the Editors of Shakespeare : ‘ Read him, therefore ; and again, and again ; and if then you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger not to understand him.’

“ To those—and I am sure there are none here—who simply have not the power to appreciate true poetry, and who do but bay, like dogs, at the sound of sweet music, I can only say in the words of the mighty poet himself, ‘ Let them rave !’ ”

Poor claptrap, of course ; but indeed many a speech more applauded than was my humble maiden effort is even composed of the same material. And have I ever forgotten the modicum of applause then accorded ? or the compliment of my senior foe, or his coming to me next morning to urge me to read for Honours instead of the modest Pass to which alone I aspired ? Pshaw ! this seems absurd, egoistic ; but it is not really so. I write to the public, and merely as one of the many with common feelings. For have we not all had our first successes (however crude), and our first glow at them, never equalled, I say, by the more sober triumphs of maturer years ? Are not the

achievements, the disappointments, of youth far more keenly, if less deeply and lastingly felt, than those of the Summer or waning Autumn of life ?

‘ Ἀὖν ἀριστεύειν, καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων’

we learn slowly that there is in truth something nobler than this, as life's sad earnest sifts us. But the desire to excel, to win praise, in some degree to rise to notice among our equals, our superiors—this is the natural desire of the heart in youth. And a slight success, a little wind of applause, is unspeakably dear to us, at that time of life when neither we nor the world yet know of what we are made, nor whether or no there be in us any sterling stuff.

So, to this very day, there is a pleasure in recalling that evening of first debate, and this notwithstanding the sad fact that, weighted down, as I contended, by the name of a double first-class man, the majority went against us ! Still, for all that, however, the Poet sits on his throne, and added laurels, since that day, have graced his kingly brow. And my opponent occupies a professorial chair, and is the writer of that admirable book, “ Constitutional Progress,” so useful a *résumé* of the history of the constitution of this great country ; and this (rare excellence) from a staunch Church point of view. And for myself, I go contentedly about the work of my curacy, not otherwise known to fame than as the modest author of “ The Harvest of a Quiet Eye.”

Well, reminiscences of College friends must take, of necessity, rather a personal complexion. Let me pass on to one more friend—to another episode in the pleasant three years.

A rare specimen of humanity was Edgar Atheling, with a peculiar genius for getting into, and out of,

rows with proctors, examiners, whom not. He it was who first of all entered my rooms, on the evening of my arrival as a Freshman, and as he often appealingly reminded me afterwards, "lent me a candle the first night." He was in residence one Term before myself. When I came up I soon heard of him, not, however, as I have shown just now, before I saw him. Accounts reached me of how, failing in his endeavour to gain permission to remove the bars from outside his window, he had covered them with gilding; how he had defied the foolish conventionalities of the University by lounging at the gate of the Quad in a green dressing-gown, scarlet Fez cap, and slippers, and with a long clay pipe in his mouth; and this in the hours before two o'clock, when the rules of the University require the academic dress. This was on the second morning of his first Term. One of the Tutors (unknown to him) coming up, and accosting him with considerable amaze, was received with a stiff bow, and the remark, "You have the advantage of me, sir. I do not remember to have been introduced to you." "Never mind that, Mr. Atheling," the Tutor somewhat warmly rejoined; "you will know me well enough some day. In the meantime, I would strongly advise you to transfer that mountebank costume to your staircase before the Vice-President comes to his rooms."

"You see," remarked Atheling afterwards, to a friend, "there was sound sense in the advice, though couched in unbecoming language. Mountebank costume, indeed! It was lovely! It was unique! But then the poor fellow hadn't the least eye for colour, and that's his misfortune, you know, not his fault."

Well, experience mingled some slight elements of gravity with his merriment, as the flying Terms sped by, and, so to speak, the silver hair of the

senior man began to streak the first gold and brown of the freshman's head. Still his ideas were remarkable to the end for originality of conception and boldness of execution.

Let me recur to one of them. He announced, one winter evening, the idea that had entered his head—the idea, matured as soon as entertained—viz., of giving a grand Amateur concert in his rooms—a concert to which ladies, and the Vice-Principal himself, with his wife and daughters, were to be invited. I laughed at the notion ; however, he was in earnest about it, and manfully carried it through. I predicted that the Vice would resent the being asked to such an affair. But assurance prevailed where diffidence would have held back, and Atheling informed me triumphantly that the “Vice” and his family were coming. Also that he had received a letter from the Belle of Oxford, accepting his invitation.

All was excitement and preparation, of course, for a long time beforehand. Glees, madrigals, solos, quartetts, overtures, were the order of the next three weeks. Great preparations were made in the rooms, and on *the* night the big college-gates were thrown open, and the host, all a fever of excitement, was watching the carriages, one after one, rolling in. The concert itself went off, I suppose, much as other such concerts do ; the performers (mostly novices at this kind of thing) affording some amusement by trying vainly to look and sing at their ease. The men, those, at least, of the so-called “fast” set, seeming to be altogether out of their element, and sadly terrified at the ladies. Indeed I was amused at the transformation that had come over the usual state of things in our Hall. Here were the rackety, rich fellows, considered, by themselves, as the *élite* of the community, awkward, shy, and bashful in the presence of ladies :

noisy enough in their set, they appeared tongue-tied and exceedingly ill at ease on this occasion. But the quiet men, some of them with the need for very careful living, yet *gentlemen*, came out into prominence, enjoying the genial change of ladies' society in Oxford—a rare occurrence there—while those were herding together in a helpless, dumb condition, sickly-looking, white-tied, black-coated, and miserable.

All, however, passed off well, and compliment after compliment was showered upon the (for a wonder) bashful host, until the last carriage rolled away. Then, as by a spell, the incubus was taken off my "fast" men, and from speechless they became uproarious. I could not help being secretly tickled to see the evident relief that they felt at being left once more heroes of their own society.

Divers of them, unlike our host, had no pretensions to the birth or breeding of gentlemen. Rich and vulgar, they commanded a certain standing in their own set; but they formed principally a society among themselves, and removed from that gathering they were as fish out of water.

What University man does not know the set of which I am thinking? Men whose wit lies in coarseness and vulgarity, whose repartees are little else than mere rudeness, whose great forte is to sing an evil song, to "chaff a cad" (who, by the way, often gets the better of the match), to spend money lavishly for admiration. Often, however (as Aristotle notices of such spendthrifts), marring their profuseness by some interspace of meanness and out-of-place frugality. Men who neither really enjoy nor use Oxford life, who neither are educated by its studies nor by its society.

For there is an education, not only in the studies but in the society of a University, if rightly sought.

and employed, which it is not wise to neglect. I have known men, serious-minded men, reading men, shut themselves up in their rooms, refuse every, even the most innocent, invitations to any genial festivities, decline even to subscribe to pleasures—however harmless and healthful—with which they will themselves have nothing to do. And all this with the best intention—with the intention of economy—with the intention of making the most of the Oxford life. Now I may say here that the ill-spared sovereign or two given towards such healthful and innocent recreations, even if they themselves held aloof from them, would have been well spent in procuring an influence for good over lighter-hearted youths, who would have said, "Well, if so and so wont join our amusements he isn't at least one of the shabby lot, nor one of the fellows who think all that is pleasant is wrong. We can respect his self-denial, his economy, although we can't or needn't share in it."

Then, though the study-element is certainly a considerable part of the Oxford education, it is by no means the only part; I had almost said, by no means the principal part. The genial life of free society, yet with its own proper and even strict etiquette; the mixing on equal terms with men of many circumstances and many minds; the interchange of free opinions, and the being placed among equals in age and standing; the responsible relation of host and guest at this time entered upon—all these things do, undoubtedly, assist in training a man to fill easily and gracefully his position in the society of after-life. His overweeningness is rubbed down, his over-bashfulness rubbed off. He gets a certain self-possession without self-conceit, which hardly can be attained so well by any other way as by a university career well and honourably and wisely spent. He is educated, I

repeat, in some measure as much by the society as by the study of the University. Thus much for the benefit of even College acquaintances. We would not speak in this utilitarian manner of College friends.

For these are to be more warmly, more earnestly regarded. What friends, not of our very kindred, are comparable to them? Dear old band, scattered now hither and thither, over the wide world; what a bond of union still joins every one of us! And how we should meet, with a gladness, a kindliness not elsewhere attainable, if at any time we might be gathered, as in those old days, again in sweet society! The string is cut, and the beads have run this way and that. Yet how naturally will they group together, how readily run into one circle, if at any time they might be strung once more, as they were (except for years of changes, but not changes to their love), upon the old dark-blue string!

Hence half the delight of the matches at Lord's and on the river, between the rival Universities. We meet them again, one by one; and the face brightens, and the eyes sparkle, and hand almost grows to hand, as we come suddenly, amid the crowd of strangers, upon some dear old College Friend.





No. XV.

RECREATION GENERALLY.

I HAVE, it is certain, by no means gathered into my handful all or nearly all the possible poppies that dot the sober corn of life. But I remember that I came out only to gather a handful ; and not with the intention of stripping the field. And it seems to be about time that the handful was tied up. Here they are, then, the gay flowers : some big and some smaller : some wide-spread and others hardly well smoothed out from their crumpling in the green case of the bud : some with a centre of jet, and some with scarce any set off to their gay scarlet ; some standing up pert and saucy, and some pulling sideways, with tears of rain upon their bent heads : various, but all of the poppy family, and gathered into one vivid bunch. Ah, may be they were better, scattered here and there among other growth ; and, being collected, a certain sameness in the colour may be wearisome to the eye. Besides, who of us would care to set a handful of poppies in the vase in our room ? Poor flowers ! they have their appropriate place on the dry summer-bank, and when just studding the corn-ranks here and there ; but you would smile at the innocence that should offer them to you as a nosegay. A bunch of snowdrops, primroses, or violets, —this would be well ; even better, some might think, a bunch of lilies or choicest roses. But a bunch of flaunting useless poppies innocently offered by some child-hand or heart :—of course you take them, rather

than hurt the kind meaning that gathered them for you ; but, once fairly out of sight of the well-intentioned giver, you do not care to carry them far. You cast them slyly over that hedgerow : there they may lie and wither quickly in the glare, or slowly in the shade. Let who will pick them up. At any rate you think no more of them.

Yet there may be those who would care to pick them up, and put them in water, if perhaps thus their languor may revive into crisp juicy life again. Some, who are out of the way of fields where poppies may be found : some, whose lot is cast amid row after row, for miles, of brick or plaster houses, and acres of baking pavement : some, thus circumstanced, might, had they the chance, care to pick up your slighted posy, and make much of it, and cherish it as a precious thing.

And even thus, let me be bold to hope, this slight ephemeral record of glad hours that now and then studded the more sedate growth of life, may find a welcome here and there. Here and there, where glad hours have now become scarce and few and far between, and dull days of monotonous work the scarcely broken rule of life. A bunch of poppies, with sometimes an ear of corn plucked together with the scarlet flower growing so close to it that one was unconsciously gathered with the other : a gay posy, with here and there, as a relief, the sober green of a graver thought serving as a useful foil to the blaze and laugh of colour. And if, in this latest of the handful, if in this tying up the bunch, I should of choice rather select the quiet tints than the gay,—why, you know that dark evergreen ivy and cool fern-fronds come in well at the last to make a frame out of which the vivid hues may burn.

But in truth I am not now going to seek for any

particular specimens of recreative enjoyment as my subject matter. I am rather about to take the whole genus of Recreation generally, and to converse about that.

There is something to be said about the *word*, Recreation, something suggestive in the consideration of its etymology. For from this we get the best definition of what the thing itself is. And I venture to say that in truth this is a matter not really so well and universally understood as at first thought it might appear to be. Come, let me ask any reader at haphazard,—How would you explain the word? What would be your definition of what is really *Recreation*? I will show presently why I think that there are many who would give, or rather, who *do* give, practically at least, a wrong and incorrect answer to the question, “What is Recreation?”

We have, I repeat, the meaning of the word given in its very etymology. As *Relaxation* plainly tells of the “*nec semper arcum tendit Apollo*,”—the letting a strung mind free from strain and tension; so *Recreation* is the restoring of that part of our being which is constantly being ground away by the ceaseless wear and tear of life. Strength and energy, tone and spirit,—these are renewed and restored to us by a healthful and enjoyable change of employment. We are then, in a measure, *recreated*; we start fresh in the business of life, with a replenished balance at our banker’s.

A healthful and enjoyable change of employment: thus I would define Recreation. And therefore I can hardly include Sleep in my definition. And yet indeed how suitably might this word “*Recreation*” be applied to describe the effect of sleep!

“The innocent sleep;

Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The death of each day’s life; sore labour’s bath;
Balm of hurt minds; great Nature’s second course;
Chief nourisher in life’s feast.”

And another poet (Dr. Young) calls it (as probably we all know),—

“Tired Nature’s sweet restorer, balmy Sleep !”

Indeed which of us but will agree as to the delightfulness, after a day of weary brain or body work, of nestling down into the inviting bed, and closing the “tir’d eyelids upon tir’d eyes,” luxuriously waiting then, just a brief conscious while, for that refreshing balm to settle upon them. For thorough enjoyment of this, it may be noted, you must have retired in good time at night, and be able thus to look forward to a tract of fair broad hours of sleep. You miss this keen satisfaction, however you may be still more appreciative of the delightsomeness of bed, if you have crawled into it at two or three in the morning, after your task of writing (necessary to be sent off on the morrow) is wearily completed. For you feel that you have, until seven o’clock, only a meagre four hours’ space for reparation of fatigue which eight would scarcely rectify. So you are in similar case with the man who comes in from a walk furiously hungry, and has perforce to content him with one very small mutton-chop. He keenly appreciates it, no doubt ; he knows, however, at the outset, that it will but whet his appetite for more. So with the very tired brain conscious of a mere strip of night left to its share. Whereas, with a long night before you, you cuddle under the clothes, and hug the conscious delight of feeling unconsciousness gathering over you :—

“Of all the thoughts of God that are
Borne inward unto souls afar,
Along the Psalmist’s music deep,
Now tell me if that any is
For gift or grace surpassing this—
“*He giveth His beloved sleep ?*”

Still this restoring power will not fall in with my present idea of *recreation*. However, in considering the etymology of the word, we can hardly altogether exclude this process of winding us up when we totter, and casting us, fresh and steady, spinning back into Life's ring on the morrow.

You see I describe Recreation as being a healthful and enjoyable change of employment. For *idleness* is not recreation. "All work and no play," it is, at least in theory, pretty generally held, result in anything but the brightness of the intellect submitted to the treatment. But here, as elsewhere, the thing is, to find the mean between extremes. For *all play and no work* lead neither to usefulness nor to happiness in the experience of those who try *this* recipe, wearied with the other. Far more tiring than hard work does the utter absence of work soon become. Look at the languid, bored, boneless state into which some of the Dunderbary class are brought by the disastrous condition in which they find themselves, of not being *compelled* to do that honest manly work which they have not stamina enough in them to do of free choice, and without compulsion. Oh! the talk of "killing time," and of "not knowing what to do"—what would not some men—men with the purpose of manhood in them, give for a few of those hours frittered away, not set out to interest, hours of contemptible fretting inaction, that *might* have been devoted to happy, manly work! Tell not me that manhood is *latent* in these simpering pseudo-idiots; and that occasion can call out a spark from whose brief flash, forsooth, they shall, with an air deprecatory of having for once been betrayed into manliness, sink back into their smouldering life of unreality, artificiality, affectation again;—tell me not *this* as a palliative. That they *have* good stuff in them, and take a pride and pleasure in graduating in the school of insipidity and unreality, is, to

my mind, far more to their condemnation than to their praise. "I write unto you, young men, *because ye are strong*;"—thus spoke a brave, loving man's heart some centuries ago. Nay! if *that* were the ground of his writing, methinks that, excepting to the few, he might have been spared the labour of an epistle now. (Ah, bear with these sharp words. *There is a sweet underlying the bitter.*

Honest and thorough work—this must be a postulate before we talk of recreation. You cannot change your employment pleurably if you have no employment at all: you cannot recreate mind and body if neither have wear and tear; or if the very so-called *recreation* is the chief wear and tear they have. And that this is so, sometimes, will be presently shown. I like to see a MAN earnest in whatever he is about. I like to see him go about his work in a *thorough* way: and I like to see him really eager, sincere, about his play. Not masking the honest interest which he ought to feel in *anything* that is worth the doing: not going about with a languid simpering pretence of having been dragged into an exertion whereas he would rather be lolling and lounging about, a carefully-rendered and near imitation of the Idiot—this character being, it would appear, indeed, the ideal of the imitation of some. Let me see him excited, alert; rather too much in earnest about the employment of the moment than not enough in earnest about it; flushed cheeks, hair tossed off the brow, as he eagerly argues about (even such a trifle as) this stroke in croquet, or this ephemeral question of the day. I would rather he kept his temper, for every reason. Especially, I think no mere game *can* possibly be worth the loss of good humour. But, of the two, I own to a preference for honest excess of vehemence, over what is, at least at first, an *insincere* and *assumed* over-apathy. I hate the folly of a man who has carefully boned himself

into a limp, inane, characterless neither-man-nor-woman. The lisp, the stare, the eye-glass, the drawl :— oh, to do him the kindness of taking him by the coat-collar and shaking him into reality, into naturalness, for but one brief half-hour !

If you are in an Idiot Asylum you know what to expect. But, in society supposed to be sane, to see young fellows with *capacities* of energy and strength taking absolute pains to appear as though born fools : this is, I own, aggravating to the last degree to my mind. I wish some one of those of whom I am thinking may happen upon this page, and set himself to use for one half-hour the faculties he is surrendering, to ask himself whether he thinks he is making life, this brief, *probationary* life, that noble thing which his inmost heart must be aware it is, or might become. And let him cast about for *some* honest employment in which a man may heartily put out the powers with which God has nobly endowed him. Oh, there is work to be done, in this world, for us all, if we will look for it, or if we will even wait for it with an honest view towards it. It is a noble sight to see a young fellow putting out the strength which God has given him, towards some worthy end. It is a pitiable sight to see him using his energies in the effort to become unenergetic, using his wit in the endeavour to appear a fool, using his strength in emulating helplessness and weakness.

You must therefore, you see, if you would know the meaning of Recreation, know also the meaning of *Work*. You must earn before you spend. Recreation must not be the business, but the leisure of life. It must be the poppy merely amid the corn. We cannot have Recreation without some Exhaustion. We must have lost something by friction before we can require to be *recreated* at all.

So we quite dismiss from our idea of Recreation

that of the absence of earnest employment. Doing nothing is the hardest of hard work : and under such a regimen the muscles and the brain become flaccid and flabby, the temper touchy and irritable, and the whole man altogether unhinged. It is said that, to insure his goods against future depredations, a pastrycook will sometimes give unlimited license to the boy whom he has taken into his shop : a day or two will sicken him. Very similar would be the case of an active-minded man doomed or privileged to be idle. After being left for a whole year with nothing to do, I fancy he would hail as Recreation a good turn on the treadmill.

Often has it been noticed, in books and in real life too, how natural a mistake, but also how great a mistake is that of the busy man, who through a life of close over-work, is always looking forward to the time when he may give up business, and retire upon a period of unlimited leisure. But I have touched on this before. It is unnecessary to explain here how complete is his misapprehension, and how, unwillingly it may be, and by compelled degrees, he discovers that it is too late for him to form new tastes, to seek new employment. That "*doing nothing*" is, to the energetic mind, no rest at all, far less recreation ; and that that to which he had looked forward all his life as the goal towards which his work was to tend, is, in reality, far more wearying than even those years of incessant over-toil had been.

But graver mistakes than this are committed through the want of rightly understanding this truth : that not *absence of occupation*, but congenial, continual, enjoyed occupation, is that in which we must seek our real recreation after toil. And so, in the secret hearts of many who have been imperfectly or mistakenly instructed,—or, may be, not instructed at all,—an

unacknowledged distaste is latent with regard to the prospect of that truest, deepest Recreation ; that *Recreation*, in the fullest and most profound sense of the word, which lies (for those who labour faithfully) at the end of this life which wears and tires us all out so. An endless inactivity ; this is more or less the prevailing idea concerning that *Rest which remaineth* ; all men's varied energies and powers of thought, and myriad branchings of action, merged in the ceaseless and unbroken singing of hymns ! Really this notion, more or less hazy, *is* one lurking, I believe, scarce detected or sifted, in the minds of many people. Can we wonder that the idea of Heaven, thus represented, becomes a dreary, an uninviting thought, to the eager mind of the young, full as this is of life, activity, and capacity for work ? But a little reflection would detect the mistake. Our actions shall praise our Maker,—not our voices only,—all our other powers being left to stagnate. It is true that the employment of Eternity shall be the singing of His praises ; but the song shall come, not from our lips only, but from our lives. So the brook sings as it rushes forth to water the valley, but is silent if it lies stagnant in the pool. So the stars praise Him in their ordered courses ; so day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth know ledge ; and though there is neither speech nor language, yet their voice is universally heard.

Well (as I said just now must sometimes be the case) I could not help picking this ear of corn ;—it grew so close to a poppy.

Properly to understand the true object of Recreation would greatly assist in guiding us to a wise selection in our search for it, and might also avert many mistakes and disappointments. You can make a blaze, no doubt, by putting the end of a candle, or a drench

of paraffine on the sinking fire. But what it really wanted was *fresh fuel*. The enlivening process to which you resorted was an illusory one. The sudden blaze soon dies down, and behold ! the fire has sunk lower than before.

Now I would show by this illustration that a large proportion of the amusements of Society are not *Recreation*. They are, in short, the serious work of life with many. The round of Balls, parties, Theatres : the gay "life of Society,"—there may be at first an excitement about it which makes the life delightful. Just as it is with the drunkard. At first there are in his choice fascinations which lead him on. But it is with him as with those living the life of frivolity ; even when the enjoyment of it has died out, there is a necessity for them to go on still. And just as he did not, in the first instance, drink with the view merely of being refreshed, recruited, so it is in the case of the dram-drinking of Society. Not recreation, but excitement, was the thing sought : it was not natural, but artificial thirst, which had to be appeased.

What wonder, then, that before long the very amusements rather tire than refresh ? What wonder that, cup after cup cloying the sated palate, the stimulating power must be heightened with hot spice of vicious pleasure, until even this also becomes tame, and that weary, bored condition is reached, that premature old age, with neither its honour nor its toil, which we may perceive in young hearts and young faces that have thus had ministered to them perpetual stimulant in the place of daily bread ? What wonder that to us sedate workers, in our quieter life, whose anxieties even are healthful, whose work is steady, and whose play, if rare, is yet even therefore the more intensely enjoyed,—what wonder that to us, moving outside the circle of that earnest and wearying frivolity,

there should ooze out, from time to time, dark hints of a withering blight gaining ground among the fair new flowers that are brought up in that unnatural and forced heat? Whispers of an ever-growing laxity of morals; of innuendo permitted or not indignantly suppressed by even fair listeners; of hideous evil taken for granted and treated as a thing allowed by tacit consent, and as that which has become matter of course? If the life of idleness tires, the life busy only in frivolities becomes such a weight upon the hands as to be ere long almost an intolerable burden, a burden whose weight is soon not innocently relieved.

Many of the amusements of Society, then, are not Recreation, but most fatiguing, distressing toil. For you must note that the languor, the lassitude, the ennui, the weary-o'-the-world look and language which is not unfamiliar to those who mix, even occasionally, in fashionable life, are not the result of excess of work, but of excess of (if we must call it so) *play*.

And besides that an idle life, as a whole, is of all the most wearisome, we have further to consider more particularly and separately the intensely *fatiguing* nature of many of the employments (for recreations we may not miscall them) of the gay (?) world. Once and away to dip somewhat deep into the night hours at some merry evening party; this might do little more harm than to set the brain spinning beyond the control of much quiet recollected thought before the wearied limbs and excited mind sought the welcome bed. Add to this the chance of somewhat later hours in the morning; and then let us say that, for the mere now-and-then of life, that censor might seem over grave, (although, in strictness right), who should too uncompromisingly censure the venial exception to what would be blameable as a rule.

But continue this night after night,—Theatre, Ball, party,—making it the rule, not the exception—and consider then the severe toil of it : the wear and tear to body, soul, and spirit. Nay, look experimentally at the results of the life to which I have alluded ; and consider whether fatigue and languor of body, intense depression of spirits, and a very searing of soul, are not, if not the inevitable, the at least frequent results of it?

Recreation, then, must be had, but it is not to be regarded as the chief object of life : if made so, it ceases, from the necessities of the case, to be *recreation*. The object of it, the very condition of its being, is that it should follow work and precede work. Hear the wise Poet-Divine (concerning whom we mused for five minutes at Chepstow) : “ Let not your recreations be lavish spenders of your time ; but choose such which are healthful, short, transient, recreative, and apt to refresh you : but at no hand dwell upon them, or make them your great employment : for he that spends all his time in sports, and calls it recreation, is like him whose garment is all made of fringes and his meat nothing but sauces ; they are healthless, chargeable, and useless.” “ It is lawful to relax and unbend our bow, but not to suffer it to be unready or unstrung.”

I remember feeling much inclined to moralize over the spectacle of a Butterfly dying in my Church one Sunday in the winter time.—Nay, I can well fancy that you will remind me, that *that* simile is surely worn out long ago. There have been too many morals drawn from butterflies, bees, and ants, to render any such use of them for the future endurable. Well, it may be so. Nevertheless I will e'en have my say about the simple, common incident. I shall probably, you know, say it at any rate in something of different words from those of my predecessors.

I was, then, passing from the reading-desk to the pulpit ; and, as I ascended the stone steps, I was caught by what struck me as a somewhat pathetic sight. A once rich-hued, vivid-barred Vanessa Atalanta butterfly, feebly fluttering towards the sunlight through the dim panes, and falling back at last helplessly to die on the dusty ledge of the window. The rich or glowing colours, so dingy and faded now, the velvet pile so threadbare, the creature whose life is so connected with summer days, fallen into the gripe of Winter ; the thing most suggestive of gaiety and careless enjoyment, now so pathetic a wreck of its summer self. Once it had wandered, a very Ginevra, away from its flowers and delights and ultramarine days, and burning noons and mellow nights, and entered the prison (to it) of these cold stone walls. Unhappily safe from casualties of birds or storms, and sheltered, I suppose, in a measure, from extremest frosts, and so having contrived to linger out a miserable existence after the summer days had gone, in which alone it was at home.

One might have moralized in many ways concerning this incident. It might have been a splendid Beauty, grown, in a moody hour, weary of the world ; slipping, in her mood, out of the golden mellow day, into some cold and "narrowing nunnery walls," and, being in truth without the heart for this secluded life, thereafter finding her mistake, and pining desolately away,—fluttering, as it were, instinctively towards the warm light, but overweak to profit by the relenting gleam, and so just sinking back to die.

But the turn the incident took in my thought was the more commonplace one. I felt inclined to lay by my prepared discourse, and to employ the obvious suggestions connected with the episode. For indeed, life is made up of commonplaces ; of events new enough,

it is true, to those first struck by the shaft of agony, or the sunbeam of joy, but all a matter-of-course to those who are the unimpassioned lookers-on—until their own turn comes.

Butterfly *hours*,—these, I might have moralized, were well. But not the butterfly *life*. And this might have been enforced by another incident connected with a dead butterfly. It was in a famous picture in the Royal Academy of one year, I think, of the Eighteen-fifties, a picture, ghastly enough, but stamping itself on the memory, a picture (it was Egg's, I think) in two panels, a picture representing the gay and splendid life, and the dismal and wretched death, of the princely Buckingham. There he lay, stretched out on the low pallet, ghastly in death, merely desolate and utterly deserted !

“ In the worst inn's worst room.”

It matters little that this line, that the picture itself, was not wholly accordant with the facts of the case. If this picture were not historically accurate, yet such an end to such a beginning and continuance is not one unknown nor uncommon in the history of the world. Gay butterflies that flaunted in the Summer get caught in the grip of the Winter days:—But I forgot. I omitted that very detail of the picture which justifies its introduction here.

Much like that forlorn insect which I had seen in the Church, there was, allegorically introduced, lying on the plebeian window-ledge,—a once gay butterfly. Threadbare in garb ; dull in hue ; the very counterpart of the gay idler that lay there, after all his trifling, brought face to face at last with a very serious matter, even with Death.

There was more than a sermon in that commonplace introduction of the dead butterfly.

It seems so especially sad to see so worse than blank an end of a life that so loved the sunshine and the beauty and the warmth, so adapted to bask in the open flowers, and to luxuriate on the south walls bossed with mellowing apricots and swelling peaches. A human butterfly, but not with the irresponsibility of the insect. God gave him that joyous heart : and foolish man would wish for him nothing better than that he might unrestrainedly indulge its summer-tastes. But did not very early a grave voice warn him that that joyousness was given to be husbanded, not spent ? That self-denial, discipline, training were the conditions of the life of Time, which here, for wise purposes, to be fully revealed one day, was appointed to be cramped, cabined, confined from its instincts of unrestraint and free following of its fancy ? It was to be "only waiting." But he would not wait. He would not now pinch a bit his income of pleasure to live on the interest merely. He would spend the principal, and that recklessly, lavishly. And soon it is all gone. Then, instead of the fulness to which sufficiency would have increased, there is no provision to satisfy that yearning for happiness which indeed was God-implanted in the beings who were originally created for happiness only ; but that a start aside on their part diverted and delayed the plan. Then, even now and here, begins the craving of that fearful famine whose gnawings shall last throughout Eternity.

And so much for mere butterflies.

We, the mentors, we, the parents, have this caution to lay to heart, that we must beware of drawing the reins too tight, and thus placing unnecessary stumbling-blocks in the way of our natural or spiritual children. We have much to answer for, if we do this. And, truly, we have need, sore need, in this matter, of all the wisdom, of all the guidance, that we can

obtain. For we have, in the necessary severity of training, both with ourselves and in the case of others, to guard against the almost certain recoil; against probable if not inevitable *reaction*.

More especially, perhaps, in the present time, since reaction is the atmosphere in which we live in our day. Children have reacted from a servile respect and an unnatural awe, into a more than due familiarity: and from the deferential use of the holy names, "Father," "Mother," have passed into the use of slang titles which I shall merely stigmatize as classable in the lowest degree of bad taste, ill-breeding, and the results of intellect debased. Statesmen have reacted from routine to revolution. Churchmen have reacted from utter baldness and deadness to the tendency towards floridity and fever. Girls have reacted from huge pelisses and poke bonnets to what I shall briefly call "Mountebank costume." Tories have reacted to Radicals under the thin skin of Conservatism. Medicine has reacted from excessive bleeding and drugging to the quackery of Homœopathy. And the old, indiscriminate horror at the very name of *novel*, whether it were innocent or baneful, has reacted to the toleration or patronizing of volumes as full of poison as are a cobra's fangs.

This by the way. In all things, certainly in our ordering the work and recreation of others, we need in truth the highest guidance and direction, to enable us to keep that even balance which is wisdom. A kind though a firm hand, this is needed, and while you will not be weakly indulgent, or traitorously lax, yet, having trained your young people to some honest labour, and put them in the way of real, thorough work, do not grudge for them, nay, rather make a point of providing for them, recruiting rests on the journey, recreative refreshment by the way. Teach

them ever, by the nobility of work, the sweetness of recreation.

But I am anxious, while I am about it, I yearn, before I end, to suggest a simple rule which might with advantage guide and direct us in our recreation.

Life is a grave thing, and yet, in society, it seems almost a crime (at least a *mistake*, which in society is held to be a worse thing than crime) to treat it or even allude to it as such. I remember being much struck with the element of truth and with a certain sad beauty, in a review of Frederick Locker's poetry, which touched upon this thought. The Reviewer described it, together with Praed's and Thackeray's, as "masked poetry." "The true feeling of the poet is masked with laughter." The poetry of men who belong to society, and who, nevertheless, amid all its froth, feel that "there are depths in our nature which even in the gaiety of drawing-rooms cannot be forgotten. Theirs is the poetry of bitter sweet—of sentiment that breaks into humour, and of solemn thought that, lest it should be too solemn, plunges into laughter." And this is, the Reviewer says, in an especial sense the character of the verse of society. "When society ceases to be simple it becomes sceptical." And this tone is assumed "in self-defence, and becomes a necessity of rapid conversation." When society is refined,—that is, when the intercourse of its constituent parts has become a thing of sickly, at least of exotic, growth ; not the healthy clustering of daisies in the meadows, or of primroses in the copse, but the unnatural culture of the hothouse ;—when society has thus been educated into artificiality, and the *real* eliminated from its life ; squeamishness substituted for modesty, nonchalance for feeling, languor for honest impulse, gristle for bones ;—when thus society

is refined, "it begins to dread the exhibition of strong feeling, no matter whether real or simulated. If real, it disturbs the level of conversation and of manners; if simulated, so much the worse. In such an atmosphere emotion takes refuge in jest, and passion hides itself in scepticism of passion. We are not going to wear our hearts upon our sleeves; rather than that, we shall pretend to have no heart at all; and if perchance a bit of it should peep out, we shall hide it again as quickly as possible, and laugh at the exposure as a good joke. If a lady in a ball-room finds that her back-hair has escaped from the ligaments with which it is held together, the best she can do is to laugh; we may laugh at ourselves also, when we give way to feeling, and pass it off as a momentary weakness."

Now there is, as I said, beauty and truth in this description; though beauty of the autumnal class, and truth which brings tears near to the eyes. To live and mix with one's fellow-men and women, and feel, all the while, that our life is bound to be a sort of tacit masquerade; that the very last character in which we dare appear is that which is truthfully our own; that, whatever depths lie far down below the surface, it is the beaded, frothy surface alone which we dare suffer to be seen by the companions of our unbusiness hours—all this, I say, is sad. Sad, this need to laugh with the lips, while all the time, it may be, a low moan lurks muffled in the heart; to have, perhaps, to talk gaily while

"All within is cheerless, dark, and cold,
When all earth's joys seem mockery and madness
And life more tedious than a tale twice told."

Sad, this knowing that, if he become (as who must not, sooner or later?) that

"Poor sequestered stag,
That from the hunter's aim hath ta'en a hurt,"

and so is now fain to languish instead of moving with gay springy step,—that then he must drop out of the care and thought of the company that would take no denial from him, a little ago, but now,

“A careless herd,
Full of the pasture, jump along by him,
And never stay to greet him.”

“’Tis just the fashion,” no doubt. But it is a cruelly sad one. However, even amid this state of things, in which reality is contrary to good taste, and emotion intolerable, and seriousness forbidden, yet, now and then (if but as a change of sensation,) a grave sentence or two is permissible. Permissible, that is, if it come from an outsider, an intruder into the group, who has tact enough to guard his intrusion from any excess of prolixity. So that I may venture upon one earnest word, if it be but a brief word, upon this theme of the maxim which should govern the choice of our recreation.

Every one, then, should be careful that his recreation be, in the first place, perfectly innocent, and bringing harm, direct or indirect, to none. Next that it be not mere trifling and childish folly (entered upon, that is, *for the sake of* trifling and in an idle spirit—I am not here speaking of a light act with, beyond it, a healthy end). For there will be bubbles on the deep stream, but we do not grudge occasional gaiety to permanent depth. There must *be* the depth, however, to justify the lightness. Not mere idleness of life, then, let our Recreation be, but a service of God, if not in itself, yet by fitting us for our direct service. This, rightly regarded, is not to sadden, but to enoble life. Is it not a glorious thing that not only our work, but our recreation, may, for its ultimate goal, propose to itself so great an end? Therefore should there be a fitness and a dignity even in the

unbending of our lighter hours ; and wise Jeremy's advice to the scholar is one that all may lay to heart for its beauty and wisdom :—

“ Spend not your time in that which profits not ; for your labour and your health, your time and your studies are very valuable ; and it is a thousand pities to see a diligent and hopeful person spend himself in gathering cockle-shells and little pebbles, in telling sands upon the shore, and making garlands of useless daisies.”

But let me say here, by way of episode, that I shall not call the work of the scientific collector a trifling amusement, if it be indeed a recreation from a graver work. Why, I might have devoted a whole Poppy-paper to a day of hunting after, say, beetles, butterflies, rare plants or ferns. What more delightful, to the adept in such things, than the starting forth, armed with net, and many boxes, or with portentous tin case—an exaggerated sandwich-box—for a day's hunting after new specimens ? There is, for one thing, the enjoyableness which belongs alike to all poppy-days—that of the free rush out into a wider air of liberty, after the confinement of close work ; also the charm of the change of employment, routine, scenery. There is, for another thing, the real relish and keen appetite which comes from the mere fact of being a collector, a relish common to all collectors—the zest of securing specimens which you possessed not before—pinning hereafter neatly set-out coleoptera, or lepidoptera, into some place long tantalizingly vacant ;—labelling the splashed or speckled or blue or snowy eggs, and gumming them on to their card ;—placing the pink-lined prickly shell into its bed of white wool ;—sticking the postage-stamp into the album and just filling the gap in the page ;—fastening into the large-leaved portfolio the

"Clora perfoliata," or the "Hymenophyllum Tunbridgeense," or the "Osmunda regalis,"—storing by any specimen which has been really self-found, and henceforth is fragrant with delightful associations of the when and the where and the how.

Then there are, for the naturalist, so many concomitant delights: blowing air, fresh sky; banks of flowers—blue-bell, and small scabious, and yellow toad-flax, and ox-eye daisies, and speckled grasses of all silky feather; why the scramble up the cliffs, the sloping and swarded cliffs, between Dover and Sandgate would be of itself delightful, quite independently of the fact that in them you find, laid out for your enjoying, a wide—what shall I call it?—"entomological garden." And the blue sea faints and dies, with calming murmur, on the yellow sands below: and the sparkles glint over it as it brims, grey and hazy, up to the horizon; and the flowers scent the warm air, and the bees penetrate the flowers, and the butterflies flaunt by, all the while you are burrowing or scratching under the roots and about the stones, after some poor—Bug—the unlearned contemptuously call it—but, to you, rare and nearly unique "specimen."

Beetles and butterflies, and "such small deer," have, however, never been the object of my ardent chase. My craving was, once upon a time, for even every kind of British Fern; nor did I value these unless myself had found my specimen. So my hungry eye would perpetually rake the hedgerows and banks in my walks; this, the sole disadvantage, for the mind and the eye are thus taken away from the wider prospect. Most enjoyable would be the voyage of search, on being assured that such and such a coy absentee *was* certainly *to be found* (by those that could) in such or such a habitat. The anticipation all the way; the eagerness as the place was neared; the sifting

and patient search : the child-bound of delight when success rewarded it ! Tracing backwards and forwards the spongy marsh after "*Botrychium lunaria* : " calculating how to bridge that deep wide ditch upon the other side of which waved profuse masses of oak or beech fern, and succeeding at last by means of sinking big stones until an insecure footing, delightful in its peril, was obtained.—Then a sufficiency of fronds for drying, or (better) roots for planting, having been secured, the triumphant arrival at home, and the sympathizing assemblage of heads, like minnows about a caddis-worm : all this was exhilarating ; truly *recreation*.

Nay, even in the nights of mild balmy Summer, see me faring forth with an eager Lepidopterist, towards Brighton Downs ; stopping on the way at a chemist's to buy a nest of cunning wooden boxes, that fitted one within the other. A long uphill walk, stimulated by curiosity on my part, and by the appetite of the collector on his ; and the scene of operations is reached. I am to learn, tyro that I am, something as to the process and excitement of "sugaring." Accordingly a halt is made at the first post, on (I believe) the racing-course ; and this is well smeared with sugar, rum, treacle, and beer—or some such compound. So the next and the next, on to some twenty or more. The night deepens ; and now after a breathless pause, we revisit the first of our snares—the dark-lantern is turned full upon the sticky preparation :—only a common moth or two fluttering about it, or gloating on it. We leave the filmy, gauzy things unmolested, and pass on to the next. A doubtful case here : still—if he were passed by, his feelings might be hurt—a box is popped on him and he is transferred to his bed of pounded laurel-leaves and chloroform. The next : and then the next :—and here is a grand find !

The excitement hereupon, if subdued, is intense ; until he is secured, and safely housed. Then a blank time succeeds, and the sport flags ; here is a fair catch or two presently ; again, perhaps a grand prize. I could not help whimsically conjecturing what would be the suspicious bearing of some vigilant policeman, unversed in the magic of lepidopterism, if, attracted by our will-o'-the-wisp lantern, he should suddenly demand an explanation of our employment. Also I fancied the scrutiny and speculations of the uninitiated if they should be, moth-like, attracted by our sugared posts next day. The fair primrose glove innocently applied, the injured remark, " Why, it's sticky !" as the result of the experiment :—fancy readily depicted it all.

But the moths became coy, and the collector was appeased, and, with a fair bag or box, we descended the heights to home, sarcasm, and supper.

Well, perhaps I have set down these ending trifles to show that I did not mean to intimate that our recreations must of necessity be, in their subject-matter, ponderous. If the life be earnest, womanly or manly, why then we can allow easily-stirred ripples to the surface of the meadow that has a good deep bottom of grass ; and froth to the full purpose-moved waters ; and ('tis for the last time that I shall weary you with the simile) *poppies in the corn*.

There is exceeding beauty in that joyous life which we sometimes find, under which earnestness lies, but which retains the child-power of quick delight and ready enjoyment. That life, of which most can recall some instances, which

" Has a grace in being gay, which even mournful souls approve ;
For the root of some grave earnest thought is understruck so
rightly
As to justify the foliage and the waving flowers above."

But I should end. I will for a moment dwell upon one point to which I did but allude in my maxim for directing our choice of Recreation—viz., *That it be perfectly innocent, and bringing harm, direct or indirect, to none.* I might (but I will not) bring in here certain reasons why, long time before I was ordained, I gave up, once and for ever, after a little searching thought, all visits to theatres. At an opera I have never been present. I might (but I refrain) bring forward certain weighty suggestions concerning card-playing and going to races. Some of my readers may like to exercise their wits in puzzling out what might be these thoughts which are not here set down. Be it enough for me to quote a (with me) very favourite couplet from Wordsworth, as to the rule which *he* ever kept in view in the lighter hours of life. It was as follows :—

“ Never to blend my pleasure or my sport
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.”

Most people can so far put two and two together as to make out my meaning, and couple my allusions, in inserting these lines in this connexion. What a different thing society, what a different place the world, would be, if in cases of *doubtful* amusements (and there are many) we established this for our rule,—*Never to blend our pleasure or our recreation with sin or temptation of others.* What said a kind wise heart, many years ago, concerning even a perfectly harmless matter, and one in which he had a perfect right to indulge? “ It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or made weak.” And again: “ If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”

It is good to be merry and wise :—it is good, also,

to be honest and true :—and the two need not be dissociated. But here I end. My poppies being now gathered, *may* (which I deprecate) bring (it is a poppy-virtue) recreative sleep to some. To other some, kindlier-hearted, and not needing great things to give them pleasure, they may be a welcome suggestion of glad hours to come, a recalling also of glad hours past, in the long ranks of the sad years. Gay Poppies pleasant to behold, laughing here and there about the useful corn.

THE END.

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